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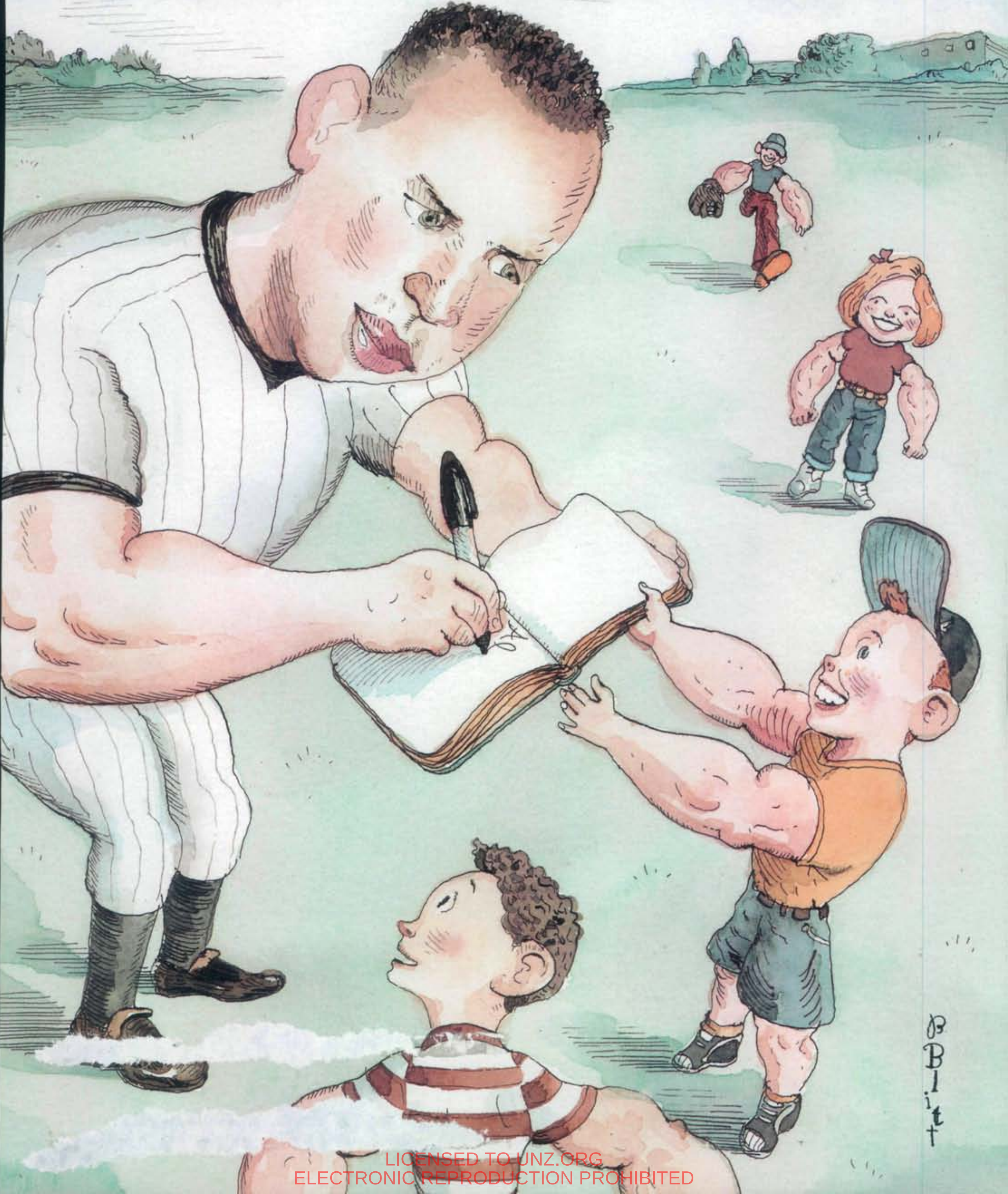

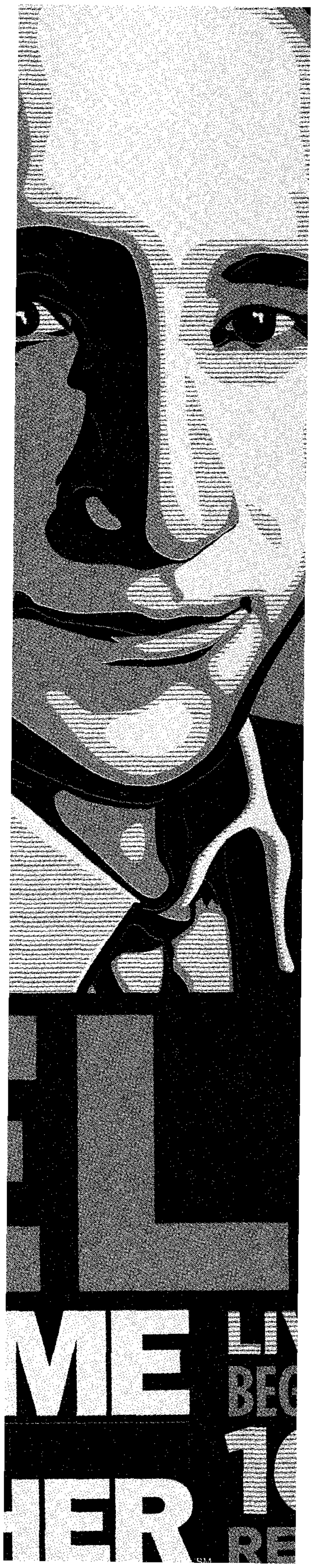

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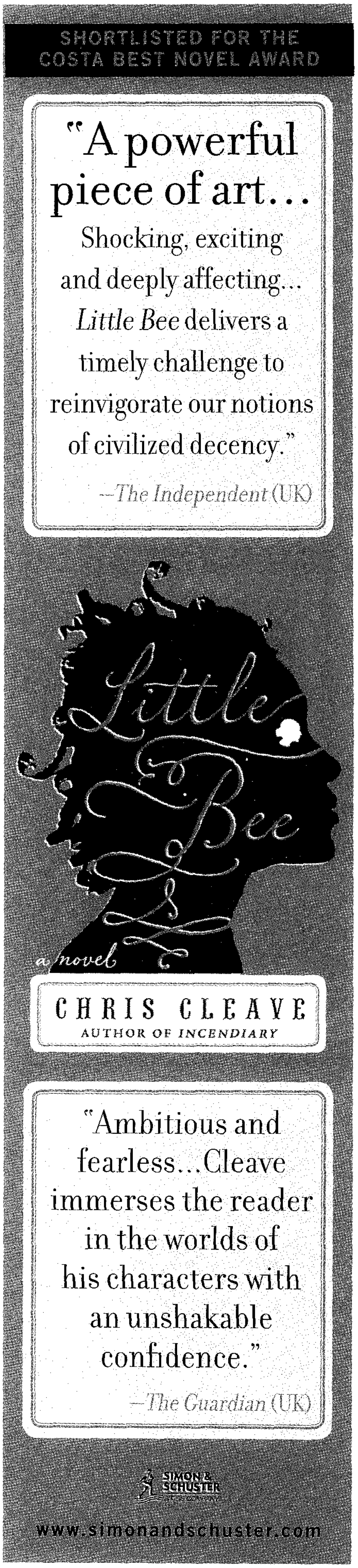
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Katherine Boo ("Opening Night," p. 22), a staff writer, has spent the past fourteen months reporting from the Mumbai slums, for a book to be published next year.

Hendrik Hertzberg (Comment, p. 17) writes about politics and public policy.

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Robert Sullivan (The Talk of the Town, p. 19) has a new book, "The Thoreau You Don't Know: What the Prophet of Environmentalism Really Meant," coming out in March.

Evan Ratliff ("Shoot!," p. 32) is a writer living in San Francisco.

Kevin Young (Poem, p. 56) won the 2007 Quill Award in Poetry for his collection "For the Confederate Dead." His latest book of poems is "Dear Darkness."

Bruce McCall (Sketchbook, p. 53) published his first children's book, "Marveltown," in September.

Daniel Zalewski ("The Background Hum," p. 46) is the magazine's features editor.

Italo Calvino (Fiction, p. 62) died in 1985, at the age of sixty-one. This story, which was written in 1968 and was previously untranslated into English, is part of his "Cosmicomics" series.

Frank Bidart (Poem, p. 65) is the author of "Watching the Spring Festival," which comes out in paperback next month.

Louis Menand (A Critic at Large, p. 68), a staff writer, teaches at Harvard.

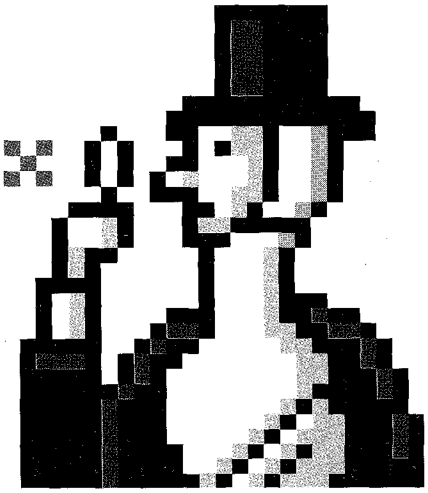
Peter Schjeldahl (The Art World, p. 79) received the Clark Prize for Excellence in Arts Writing last year. His book "Let's See: Writings on Art from *The New Yorker*" came out last spring.

Alex Ross (Musical Events, p. 77) is the author of "The Rest Is Noise: Listening to the Twentieth Century," for which he won a 2008 Guardian First Book Award.

Barry Blitt (Cover), who contributes regularly to the magazine, created the illustrations for a new children's book, "What's the Weather Inside?," which will be published in March.

THIS WEEK ON NEWYORKER.COM

Audio: *Roger Angell* reads a John Updike story on the fiction podcast. / A weekly political roundtable hosted by *Dorothy Wickenden*. / *Louis Menand* talks about Donald Barthelme. / Video: Scenes shot by *Katherine Boo* and the children of Gautam Nagar. / *Peter Schjeldahl* takes readers' questions about art. / The launch of our online Book Club. / Blogs: *Evan Osnos* on life in China, *Richard Brody* looks ahead to the Oscars, plus posts by *Hendrik Hertzberg*, *George Packer*, *Steve Coll*, *James Surowiecki*, and *Sasha Frere-Jones*. / A complete archive of every issue, back to 1925. / Animated cartoons and the caption contest.



THE MAIL

WORK AND BABY

Jill Lepore, in her article on breastfeeding, asks, "When did 'women's rights' turn into 'the right to work'?" ("Baby Food," January 19th). The ability to economically support myself and my family, to contribute to society by pursuing the discipline that I studied for more than a decade to become qualified to practice, and to have my husband take on the role of primary caregiver in the first months of our son's life are all opportunities that I heartily thank the women's movement for. I didn't enjoy breastpumping at work, but it enabled my husband to feed our baby while I was there. Six to twelve months of maternity leave per child would be a personal, professional, and economic disaster for plenty of women and families. It is worth noting that the countries that have these types of policies also tend toward abysmally low birth rates. Policies that help men and women to participate both in the workforce and in family life are what parents need, and support for breastpumping is one of these.
Jill Foley
Princeton, N.J.

As a mother who spends prep periods at my teaching job pumping milk while locked in the telephone booth in the English office, I spend a lot of time thinking that this is probably not what is meant by "breast is best." More than that, I think, At what cost? For working and pumping mothers, there's more at stake here than the cost of a pump. There's the lost productivity that we are expected to make up for elsewhere in our days. Pumping is not suited to multitasking. While I fumble with the bottles, my non-nursing colleagues are grading papers, responding to parent e-mails, planning lessons; in a word, working. This is a distinctively American paradox: in our quest to insure that a woman can have it all if she just tries, we end up making her feel that she has to do it all in order to get by.
Emelie C. Gunnison
Walnut Creek, Calif.

As I read Lepore's article, I recalled my exhilaration two years ago upon being accepted into a three-day fellowship program for professional women reëntering the workforce—and my subsequent disappointment upon deciding to pull out of the program after learning that I could not have my three-month-old daughter, whom I had chosen to breastfeed exclusively, with me unless I brought along a full-time caregiver. Exquisite, isn't it, the irony of a back-to-work program for women that is unable to accommodate a nursing infant in a manner more creative than "find your own child care"?
Sariah Toronto
New York City

Lepore's article is a voice of reason in a baby culture gone mad. I had the first of my three babies a little more than seven years ago. I have worked full time and part time, and have also stayed home full time. I have nursed, pumped, and formula-fed. I have friends who homeschool, nurse their children on demand day and night into their third year, and think bottles are akin to child abuse; I also have friends who would never consider nursing and think that there is nothing more appalling than the sight of a woman nursing in public. I think that every one of us is doing the best she can. No modern convenience can change the simple fact that parenting is just plain hard (punctuated, of course, by wonderful moments). To me, the great gift of feminism is that I can choose the kind of life I want to live. It does not mean that, because I can have it all, I am less of a woman if I do not want to have it all.
Nannette Petersen
Eugene, Ore.

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Letters should be sent with the writer's name, address, and daytime phone number via e-mail to themail@newyorker.com. Letters may be edited for length and clarity, and may be published in any medium. All letters become the property of The New Yorker and will not be returned; we regret that owing to the volume of correspondence we cannot reply to every letter.

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GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
22	23	24	18	19	20	21

THIS WEEK

THE THEATRE
THE WAY WE WERE

The Chicago-based director David Cromer, who last year staged the inspired musical "Adding Machine," directs a revival of Thornton Wilder's 1938 masterpiece, "Our Town," at the Barrow Street Theatre. Cromer, fittingly, also plays the Stage Manager. (See page 6.)

NIGHT LIFE
LATE ARRIVAL

Jovanotti, an Italian pop star who has worked in Europe for two decades, makes his U.S. début this week. In his eleven studio albums, the singer has embraced everything from soaring New Age keyboard passages to skittery global rhythms; expect his far-ranging style (and his passionate fans) to be on display at his shows at the Highline Ballroom and (Le) Poisson Rouge. (See page 7.)

ART
SIGHT UNSEEN

At least since the Russian Suprematist Kazimir Malevich painted a white square on a white canvas, in 1918, visual artists have been playing perceptual games of hide-and-seek. The nine emerging artists in the Drawing Center's exhibition "Apparently Invisible" carry on the tradition. (See page 9.)

DANCE
FLAMENCO FLAIR

The New York Flamenco Festival imports two monuments of the form from Spain. Antonio Gades's rendering of "Carmen," adapted from the 1983 Carlos Saura film, is a landmark work in narrative flamenco. And the Gypsy clan Los Farruco, even without the recently incarcerated prince, Farruquito, is the embodiment of tradition. (See page 10.)

MOVIES
COMING HOME

In 1967, the Art Theatre Guild, a Japanese distributor of European movies, began financing independent films. The titles alone, such as "Eros Plus Massacre," "Double Suicide," and "Throw Away Your Books, Let's Go Into the Street," suggest the Guild's audacity. The Japan Society is offering a dozen films from the nineteen-sixties and seventies. (See page 14.)

"Taoub," at the New Victory. Photograph by Landon Nordeman.

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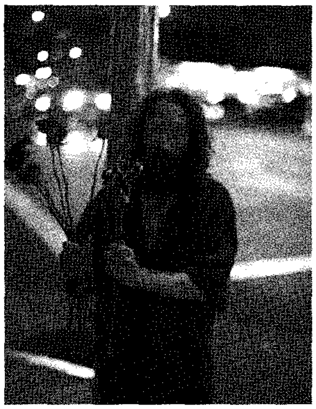
CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
ORDINARY MAGIC

Paul Graham, a British photographer who relocated to New York in 2002, has been making some of the best work in any medium since he began taking pictures and publishing books, in the early nineteen-eighties. That he remains little known outside his field might seem puzzling, but his signature mix of blunt realism, accidental beauty, and needling social critique isn't exactly a hot commodity these days. Maybe that's why his work looks so perversely right at MOMA, where color images excerpted from Graham's recent twelve-volume book project, titled "a shimmer of possibility," are arranged in stuttering, cinematic sequences of up to nine pictures. The work describes non-events so ordinary you wouldn't normally stop to look at them: a man mows grass in the rain; a woman with copper-colored hair eats takeout chicken; as the sun sets in the distance, a girl and her father play basketball in the fading light. Because Graham notices everything, everything counts. Even a big white Styrofoam cup has an undeniable presence, poignance, and weight.

—*Vince Aletti*



PAUL GRAHAM, "SAN FRANCISCO, 2005"/COURTESY MOMA

THE THEATRE
OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

CHAUTAUQUA!
The National Theatre of the United States of America presents a production that explores the intersection between art and commerce. Opens Feb. 21. (P.S. 122, First Ave. at 9th St. 212-352-3101.)

DISTRACTED
Cynthia Nixon stars in Lisa Loomer's comic drama, about a mother whose son may have attention-deficit disorder. Mark Brokaw directs the Roundabout Theatre Company production. In previews. (Laura Pels, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300.)

FIRE THROWS
Ripe Time presents an adaptation of Sophocles' "Antigone," directed by Rachel Dickstein. In previews. Opens Feb. 22. (3LD Art & Technology Center, 80 Greenwich St. 212-352-3101.)

GATES OF GOLD
Kent Paul directs a new drama by Frank McGuinness, about the contentious relationship between the founders of Dublin's Gate Theatre. Previews begin Feb. 19. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

GUYS AND DOLLS
Oliver Platt, Craig Bierko, Kate Jennings Grant, and Lauren Graham star, with music and lyrics by Frank Loesser and a book by Jo Swerling and Abe Burrows. Des McAnuff directs. In previews. (Nederlander, 208 W. 41st St. 212-307-4100.)

HEROES
The Keen Company presents the New York première of Tom Stoppard's translation of the comedy by Gérald Sibleyras, about a group of retired French First World War soldiers living in a veterans' home in 1959. John Cullum, Jonathan Hogan, and Ron Holgate star. Previews begin Feb. 24. (Clurman, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

HUMOR ABUSE
Manhattan Theatre Club presents a one-man show co-written by and starring Lorenzo Pisoni, about his experience as the youngest member of the Bay Area's Pickle Family Circus. Erica Schmidt, who co-wrote, directs. Previews begin Feb. 19. (City Center Stage II, at 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

KASPAR HAUSER
The Flea commissioned this play by Elizabeth Swados and Erin Courtney, about a mysterious boy found in Nuremberg, Germany, in 1828, who had lived in a dungeon his entire life. In previews. (41 White St. 212-352-3101.)

MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA
Lili Taylor and Jena Malone star in the New Group's production of Eugene O'Neill's trilogy, based on the Oresteia, set in a New England town at the end of the Civil War. Scott Elliott directs. In previews. Opens Feb. 19. (Acorn, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

OTHELLO
Theatre for a New Audience presents the Shakespeare play, directed by Arin Arbus. In previews. Opens Feb. 22. (The Duke on 42nd Street, 229 W. 42nd St. 646-223-3010.)

OUR TOWN
David Cromer ("Adding Machine") directs the Thornton Wilder classic, and also plays the Stage Manager. In previews. (Barrow Street Theatre, 27 Barrow St. 212-868-4444.)

THE SAVANNAH DISPUTATION
The New York première of a play by Evan Smith, about a religious Catholic woman who invites a missionary into her home. Marylouise Burke, Dana Ivey, Reed Birney, and Kellie Overbey star; Walter Bobbie directs. In previews. (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

SOUL SAMURAI
Qui Nguyen wrote this drama, a seventies-inspired samurai story about a young woman who avenges her lover's murder in Brooklyn. Presented by Ma-Yi Theatre Company, in association with Vampire Cowboys Theatre Company. In previews. Opens Feb. 19. (HERE Arts Center, 145 Sixth Ave., at Spring St. 212-352-3101.)

THE STORY OF MY LIFE
Neil Bartram wrote the score and Brian Hill wrote the book for this new musical, starring Will Chase and Malcolm Gets, about the relationship between a successful writer and his best friend, who never left home. Directed by Richard Maltby, Jr. In previews. Opens Feb. 19. (Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

TALES OF AN URBAN INDIAN
As part of the Public LAB series, Darrell Dennis wrote this semi-autobiographical one-man show, about a young Native American's life on the reservation and in Vancouver. Herbie Barnes directs. Previews begin Feb. 20. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

THAT PRETTY PRETTY; OR, THE RAPE PLAY
The world première of a play by Sheila Callaghan, about a screenwriter who contemplates including a pair of ex-strippers who murder a right-wing pro-lifer in his screenplay. Kip Fagan directs, at the Rattlestick. In previews. Opens Feb. 23. (224 Waverly Pl. 212-868-4444.)

33 VARIATIONS
Jane Fonda, Samantha Mathis, and Colin Hanks star in a new play written and directed by Moisés Kaufman, about a musicologist studying Beethoven's fascination with a waltz. In previews. (O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200.)

THIS BEAUTIFUL CITY
The Civilians ("Gone Missing") apply their interview-to-musical method to the subject of evangelical Christians, at the Vineyard. Written by Steven Cosson and Jim Lewis, with music and lyrics by Michael Friedman. In previews. Opens Feb. 22. (108 E. 15th St. 212-353-3366.)

THREE SISTERS
Classical Theatre of Harlem presents the Chekhov play, directed by Christopher McElroen. Opens Feb. 18. (Harlem Stage Gatehouse, 150 Convent Ave., at 135th St. 212-281-9240.)

WEST SIDE STORY
Arthur Laurents directs the 1957 Bernstein-Sondheim-Robbins musical, for which he wrote the libretto. Matt Cavanaugh and Josefina Scaglione star. Previews begin Feb. 23. (Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE WIDOWING OF MRS. HOLROYD
The Mint presents this 1914 play by D. H. Lawrence, about a middle-class woman who comes to hate her working-class husband. In previews. (311 W. 43rd St. 212-315-0231.)

THE WINTER'S TALE
At BAM, in repertory with "The Cherry Orchard," the Bridge Project mounts the Shakespeare romance, starring Simon Russell Beale, Sinéad Cusack, Rebecca Hall, Richard Easton, Josh Hamilton, and Ethan Hawke. Sam Mendes directs. In previews. Opens Feb. 20. (Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St. 718-636-4100.)

ZOMBIE
Bill Connington wrote and performs this solo play adapted from the novella by Joyce Carol Oates, about a psychopathic sexual predator and serial killer. In previews. Opens Feb. 21. (Studio, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

NOW PLAYING

HEDDA GABLER
In this revival of Henrik Ibsen's 1890 masterpiece (in a new adaptation by Christopher Shinn, directed by Ian Rickson), Hedda (Mary-Louise Parker), a beautiful aristocratic woman trapped by marriage in a bourgeois provincial Norwegian community, struggles to assert over her existence some of her father's command and control. In a moment of impetuous weakness, Hedda married an academic, Jørgen Tesman (Michael Cerveris), whose buoyancy about the future contrasts with Hedda's rueful vision of a lifetime of loveless boredom. Fine-boned and wasp-waisted, Parker plays Hedda as an icy, eye-rolling, passive-aggressive bitch. Hedda's own suicide, when it comes, is not an act of contrition but an act of will, the only gesture of freedom left to her. It is intended as a perverse transcendence, a form of negative creation. In Parker's cold-shoulder interpretation, however, it plays more

like sulking for keeps. (Reviewed in our issue of 2/9 & 16/09.) (American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-719-1300.)

SHIPWRECKED! AN ENTERTAINMENT—THE AMAZING ADVENTURES OF LOUIS DE ROUGEMENT (AS TOLD BY HIMSELF)

At Primary Stages, a delightful take on the nineteenth-century adventure tale, by Donald Margulies ("Dinner with Friends"). Michael Countryman plays Rougement, a thrill-seeking Englishman who joins a pearl-hunting expedition off the coast of Australia, only to be washed ashore on a desert island and, eventually, welcomed into an Aboriginal tribe. Donnetta Lavinia Grays and Jeremy Bobb play all the other characters, from Queen Victoria to Rougement's faithful canine, Bruno; they also supply sound effects, using various objects around the stage. The piece, zany as it is, never crosses into parody; rather, it spins Rougement's prim narration ("I laughed, with bitter irony!") into a warm, oddball homage to a genre that Margulies clearly adores. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

THE THIRD STORY

The playwright and drag performer Charles Busch packs gangsters, clones, and lipstick into this pulpy meditation on motherhood, and the result is a convoluted bore. Kathleen Turner (as if Busch weren't battle-axe enough) and Jonathan Walker play a mother and son in nineteen-forties Omaha, who work out their co-dependency issues as they collaborate on a screenplay: a sci-fi noir about a Mob queen (Busch) with parenting issues of her own. (For good measure, Busch throws in yet another narrative, about a Russian sorceress.) The parallel plots bounce similar motifs off alternating fun-house mirrors, but the effect, rather than revelatory, is simply repetitive; no amount of clever doubling can compensate for the thinness of the emotional through-line. (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 212-279-4200.)

UNCLE VANYA

Maggie Gyllenhaal, Peter Sarsgaard, Mamie Gummer, and Denis O'Hare star in the Chekhov play, directed by Austin Pendleton. (Classic Stage Company, 136 E. 13th St. 212-352-3101.)

Leonard Cohen performs his first U.S. show in fifteen years, at the Beacon Theatre.

ANDY FRIEDMAN

YOU'RE WELCOME AMERICA. A FINAL NIGHT WITH GEORGE W BUSH

Will Ferrell, whose rise to fame playing cocky half-wits coincided handily with the Presidency of George W. Bush, brings his masterly impersonation to Broadway. "I feel as free as balls in boxers," W. tells us—after expressing good wishes for "the Tiger Woods guy"—then proceeds to reflect on his life, his accomplishments, and his genitals. With the director Adam McKay, Ferrell has deftly fleshed out his "Saturday Night Live" impression into a refined comic character, able to sustain a full evening of yuks. And it's a fine time to satirize our forty-third President; with Bush out of office, the laughter is angst-free, joyful in the knowledge that the only harm he can do now is to the Texas brush. (Cort, 138 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200.)

Also Playing

THE AMERICAN PLAN: Samuel J. Friedman, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200. **ARISTOCRATS:** Irish Rep, 132 W. 22nd St. 212-727-2737. **AUGUST: OSAGE COUNTY:** Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **AVENUE Q:** Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **BECKY SHAW:** Second Stage, 307 W. 43rd St. 212-246-4422. **BILLY ELLIOT THE MUSICAL:** Imperial, 240 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **THE CHERRY ORCHARD:** BAM's Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St. 718-636-4100. **THE CRIPPLE OF INISHMAAN:** Atlantic Theatre Company, 336 W. 20th St. 212-279-4200. **GARDEN OF EARTHLY DELIGHTS:** Minetta Lane Theatre, 18 Minetta Lane. 212-307-4100. **IN THE HEIGHTS:** Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 212-239-6200. **PAL JOEY:** Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 212-719-1300. **SHREK THE MUSICAL:** Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 212-239-6200. **SOUTH PACIFIC:** Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200. **SPEED-THE-PLOW:** Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200. Through Feb. 22. **THE 39 STEPS:** Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.

NIGHT LIFE

ROCK AND POP

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL

237 W. 42nd St. (212-997-4144)—Feb. 18: **Ralph Stanley** and his **Clinch Mountain Boys.** The master banjo picker cooks up a night of top-shelf bluegrass. Feb. 21: **Leo Nocentelli,** the famed guitarist for the Meters, and the New Orleans phenom **Trombone Shorty** lead a pre-Mardi Gras throwdown.

BEACON THEATRE

Broadway at 74th St. (800-745-3000)—Feb. 19: **Leonard Cohen.** The great bard of Montreal returns to this newly restored Art Deco theatre for his first U.S. concert in fifteen years. Cohen, now seventy-four, published his début book of poems, "Let Us Compare Mythologies," in 1956, when Bob Dylan was only fifteen. He went on to write several more books (most notably, the groundbreaking novel "Beautiful Losers") before Judy Collins launched his music career with her 1966 rendition of his mystical, yearning love song "Suzanne." In the mid-nineties, the enigmatic Cohen largely retreated from the music world, abandoning live performances and living in a Zen monastery outside Los Angeles, where he was ordained as a Buddhist monk. In 2006, after learning that his longtime personal manager had drained most of his life savings, he returned to the stage, offering dark, melancholic masterpieces like "Hallelujah" to a generation hungry for gnomic, religious wisdom and worldly storytelling.

DEATH BY AUDIO

49 S. 2nd St., Brooklyn (No phone)—Feb. 19: **Martin Bisi,** a legendary Brooklyn-based recording engineer, producer, guitarist, and singer, performs material from his latest release, "Sirens of the Apocalypse," an infectious, experimental pop album. In 1981, with help from Brian Eno, Bisi and his then partner **Bill Laswell** (who joins him here) opened O.A.O. Studio, near the Gowanus Canal. (It is now known as B.C. Studio.) Since then, he's worked on seminal albums by a vast array of artists, including Sonic Youth, John Zorn, Afrika Bambaataa, and Helmet, among hundreds of others. Between sessions, Bisi has kept up his songwriting, and his latest album is full of chaotic, noisy, and passionate moments, not unlike his early Sonic Youth recordings.

HIGHLINE BALLROOM

431 W. 16th St. (212-414-5994)—Feb. 22: Though the local group the **Toasters** never scored any major hits, they were a major influence on the American ska scene during the eighties, inspiring later successful acts like the Mighty Mighty Bosstones and No Doubt. The brainchild of the Brit expat vocalist Rob (Bucket) Hingley, the Toasters imbued their hiccupy Two Tone-inspired music with a distinctive New York sensibility. The ska-revival trend has long since moved on, but Hingley—he's the band's only remaining original member—and the Toasters still attract a loyal following. Feb. 18: The Italian star **Jovanotti** (Lorenzo Cherubini) sings in a rich baritone and raps with a quick tongue. He's had a long career and has borrowed from around the globe to flesh out his songwriting style. (One of his albums is in Spanish.) A committed pacifist, he at times sounds like Manu Chao lite. In addition to a solid following in Italy (his last four records went to No. 1 there), his fans include Michael Franti, Ben Harper, Carlinhos Brown, Sergio Mendes, and Bono, all of whom he's recorded with.

JOE'S PUB

425 Lafayette St. (212-539-8777)—Feb. 20: The up-and-coming Irish singer-songwriter **Fionn Ó Lochlainn** plays a hard-rocking guitar (as well as piano and other instruments) and counts Billy Bragg among the growing number of folks who appreciate his approach.

(LE) POISSON ROUGE

158 Bleecker St. (212-796-0741)—Feb. 19: **Jovanotti** (see the Highline Ballroom). Feb. 21: **Eric Lindell** sings in a soulful, raspy voice that has echoes of Jeff Buckley, but with a greater affin-

ity for R. & B. It's a style that earned him a record deal with the blues label Alligator (his third release for the company, "Gulf Coast Highway," comes out next month) and has made him popular on the West Coast and in his adopted city, New Orleans. Expect him to deliver a seasoned performance here, and to walk away with more than a few new fans.

"LET'S ZYDECO"

The concert series dedicated to the various indigenous musical forms of Louisiana has arranged for a visit by **Nathan & the Zydeco Cha-Chas** on Feb. 22. The accordionist Nathan Williams named his group for a song by the late zydeco monarch Clifton Chenier, but Williams is no nostalgic traditionalist. His band mixes R. & B. influences into its musical gumbo; the repertoire includes a French-language version of Stevie Wonder's "Isn't She Lovely." (Connolly's, 121 W. 45th St. For more information, call 212-685-7597, or visit www.letszydeco.com.)

TERMINAL 5

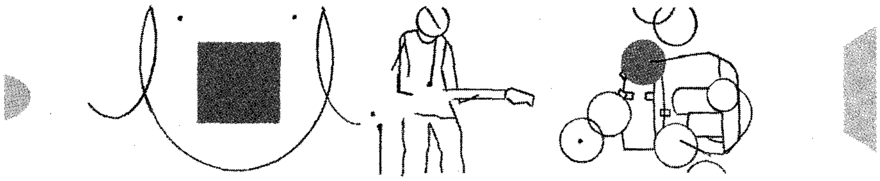
610 W. 56th St. (212-582-6600)—Feb. 23: **Jimmy Eat World,** a punky emo-pop outfit from Mesa, Arizona, had its big break in 2001, when four hook-laden singles from the album "Bleed American" vaulted up the pop charts. Feb. 24: **Tom Jones.** Though the Welsh wonder hasn't released a collection of new material in more than fifteen years, he has a new album, "24 Hours," in the works and he's set to bring his high-powered vocal style back to the stage. His underwear-throwing fans may show up to hear old favorites like "What's New, Pussycat?," but Jones (whom Queen Elizabeth II knighted in 2006) is sure to showcase material from the forthcoming album, which features contributions from Bono and the Edge, of U2.

TOWN HALL

123 W. 43rd St. (212-840-2824)—Feb. 19-20: Antony Hegarty, the lead singer of the local group **Antony and the Johnsons,** has an angelic voice and a confessional approach that have endeared him to the likes of Lou Reed and Björk. Four years ago, he took home the prestigious Mercury Prize for the album "I Am a Bird Now." His latest release, "The Crying Light," came out last month.

UNION POOL

484 Union Ave., Brooklyn (718-609-0484)—Feb. 18: The country-leaning rock-and-roll trio the **Wowz** traffic in polished harmonies and the occasional twang, but behind the rough folk façade there's a great deal of wit and allusion, and a deeply urban core—the Everly Brothers with a New York accent. Joining the bill is **Paleface,** whose husky voice, cadenced strumming, and choo-chooing harmonica suggest a life on the road. (He's been on tour with the drummer Monica Samalot since 2007.) Also with **Ching Chong Song.** Julia LaMendola's mellifluous voice and haunting musical-saw bowing compliment Daniel Gower's theatrical piano and vocal harmonies in this unique cabaret-like duo.



POP NOTES
A WARD SHOW

The singer-songwriter M. Ward established a loyal following in the course of the decade before his breakout album, last year. Somewhat confusingly, that effort was a side project, a duet album with the actress and singer Zooey Deschanel recorded under the name She & Him, which dominated both critics' lists and the playlists of upscale gift shops. Now Ward is releasing **"Hold Time"** (Merge), his first post-She & Him solo album and his seventh record over all. The opener, "For Beginners," provides a refresher course in Ward's method: gentle vocals; lovely melodies; romantic and spiritual lyrical concerns. The song balances the modest intimacy of country-flavored folk with showy, almost glam-rock hooks. When Ward sings "So draw back your bows, you hunters," it's impossible not to think of Leonard Cohen, just as when he sings "absolute beginners" it's impossible not to think of David Bowie. Similarly, "Never Had Nobody Like You" attaches the stomping rhythm of Gary Glitter's "Rock & Roll (Part 1)" to a sweet little love song. Ward, a folkie at heart, depends on direct borrowing: "Jailbird" uses lyrics from Bob Dylan's "Down in the Flood," and "One Hundred Million Years" sounds like an unearthed Mississippi John Hurt song. At times, the debts are explicit: there's a beguiling version of Buddy Holly's "Rave On" and a rendition of Don Gibson's "Oh Lonesome Me" done as a moody, pedal-steel-filled duet with Lucinda Williams. Deschanel also contributes vocals to two tracks.

"Black John" (Eclecto Groove) is the third record from the Soul of John Black, which is the sole proprietorship of the singer and songwriter John Bigham. Bigham, who played guitar and percussion for Miles Davis in the jazz great's final years, went on to join the ska-funk outfit Fishbone and has served as a sideman and arranger for artists as diverse as Dr. Dre and Bruce Hornsby. The John Black project has careered from wildly eclectic funk (on its self-titled 2003 début) to more straightforward blues (on its sophomore album, "The Good Girl Blues"). Here, Bigham delivers a dozen mash notes to sixties and seventies soul music, sometimes going heavy ("Betty Jean," a tribute to the gonzo funk legend Betty Davis), sometimes going light (the arcadian, acoustic "Thinking About You").

—Ben Greenman

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

"AMERICAN SONGBOOK"

The composer **Nico Muhly** (Feb. 18), the Broadway favorite **Sutton Foster** (Feb. 19), the composer **Alan Menken** (Feb. 20), and the cabaret-jazz artists **John Pizzarelli** and **Jessica Molaskey** (Feb. 21) deliver tunes both classic and contemporary. (Allen Room, Rose Theatre, Broadway at 60th St. 212-721-6500.)

BIRDLAND

315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—The singer **Bobby Caldwell** is hugely popular in Japan, but in the States he's best known for the 1978 hit "What You Won't Do for Love." Touring in style, he's here Feb. 18-21 with a sixteen-piece big band.

BLUE NOTE

131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—Feb. 17-22: The characteristic soulfulness of **David Sanborn's** alto-saxophone playing transcends his occasionally lightweight presentation. One of his heroes, the saxophonist Hank Crawford, died last month, and his music is sure to find echoes in this run.

CAFÉ CARLYLE

Carlyle Hotel, Madison Ave. at 76th St. (212-744-1600)—Feb. 17-March 7: The vocalist **Ute Lemper** brings fierce wit and biting intelligence to her performances.

DIZZY'S CLUB COCA-COLA

Broadway at 60th St. (212-258-9595)—Feb. 17-22 and Feb. 24-March 1: **Ann Hampton Callaway,** a gifted singer, is backed by a group of exceptional musicians, including the pianist **Ted Rosenthal,** the bassist **Jay Leonhart,** and the drummer **Victor Lewis.**

IRIDIUM

1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—Feb. 19-22: The once inventive and still dazzling jazz guitarist **Stanley Jordan.** Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.**

JAZZ AT LINCOLN CENTER

Broadway at 60th St. (212-721-6500)—Feb. 19-21: At the Rose Theatre, an A-list roster—including the **Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra,** with **Wynton Marsalis,** the saxophonist **Joe Lovano,** and the singer **Dianne Reeves**—celebrates the seventieth anniversary of Blue Note Records.

JAZZ STANDARD

116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—Feb. 18-22: **Randy Weston's African Rhythms Quintet.** The Brooklyn-born pianist and composer Weston combines the rhythmic diversity of the African Diaspora and the lyrical smarts of New York bebop. His group includes a cadre of familiar players, among them the bassist **Alex Blake** and the trombonist **Benny Powell.**

"LYRICS & LYRICISTS"

The lyricist **David Zippel** ("City of Angels," "Mulan"), with support from a number of singers, including **Lillias White,** reflects on his own work and personal favorites by others. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. Feb. 21-23.)

VILLAGE VANGUARD

178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—Feb. 17-22: The imposing trumpeter and film composer **Terence Blanchard,** a native of New Orleans, has displayed increased expressive depth since the 2007 release of the album "A Tale of God's Will (A Requiem for Katrina)."

ZANKEL HALL

Seventh Ave. at 57th St. (212-247-7800)—Feb. 18: The pianist and vocalist **Michael Feinstein** accentuates the positive, as the great lyricist Johnny Mercer once wrote, in this performance marking Mercer's centennial. The vocalists **Lucie Arnaz** and **Capathia Jenkins** will lend a hand in honoring the wordsmith behind many of the twentieth century's most enduring songs. Feb. 19: In the fifties, the celebrated conductor and composer **André Previn** was a best-selling jazz pianist. He returns to this passion during his eightieth-birthday celebration.

ART
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—**"Cast in Bronze: French Sculpture from Renaissance to Revolution."** Opens Feb. 24. ♦ **"Beyond Babylon: Art, Trade, and Diplomacy in the Second Millennium B.C."** Through March 15. ♦ **"Pierre Bonnard: The Late Interiors."** Bonnard (1867-1947) lived to witness the Nazi occupation of France and the death of his beloved wife, Marthe; the paintings here evince a dissolution of form that is close to hallucinogenic and not at all reducible to the pretty-placidity label with which his œuvre has been tagged. But the stunning exhibition of these late interiors—which were made in his home and garden at Le Cannet, near Cannes—do confirm an ecstasy in Bonnard's vision of objects as scintillating coagula of color. An orange jug on a white cloth vibrates with green highlights; the bathroom in which Bon-

LAURENT CILLUFFO

nard so often painted Marthe in the tub reels like a hall of mirrors in cream and pink with verdigris undertones; Marthe herself evanesces in hot yellow and lavender. Bonnard wrote of "crude seeing and intelligent seeing"—his eye here is not just intelligent but wise. Through April 19. ♦ **"Raphael to Renoir: Drawings from the Collection of Jean Bonna."** Through April 19. ♦ **"Raqib Shaw."** Through March 1. ♦ **"Calder Jewelry."** Through March 1. ♦ **"Walker Evans and the Picture Postcard."** Through May 25. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—**"a shimmer of possibility: Photographs by Paul Graham."** Through May 18. ♦ **"Here Is Every: Four Decades of Contemporary Art."** Through March 23. ♦ **"Words in Freedom: Futurism at 100."** Through April 6. ♦ **"Vik Muniz: Rebus."** Through Feb. 23. ♦ **"The Printed Picture."** Through June 1. ♦ **"Performance 1: Tehching Hsieh."** Through May 18. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—**"The Third Mind: American Artists Contemplate Asia, 1860-1989."** Through April 19. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 7:45.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (212-570-3600)—**"Sites."** Opens Feb. 19. ♦ **"Alex Bag."** Through April 30. ♦ **"Elad Lassry: Three Films."** Through April 30. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM
200 Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—**"Unearthing the Truth: Egypt's Pagan and Coptic Sculpture."** Through May 10. ♦ **"The Black List Project: Timothy Greenfield-Sanders and Elvis Mitchell."** Through March 29. ♦ **"Burning Down the House: Building a Feminist Art Collection."** Through April 5. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and weekends, 11 to 6.)

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
Central Park W. at 79th St. (212-769-5100)—**"Climate Change: The Threat to Life and a New Energy Future."** Through Aug. 16. ♦ **"The Butterfly Conservatory: Tropical Butterflies Alive in Winter."** Through May 25. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45.)

BARD GRADUATE CENTER
18 W. 86th St. (212-501-3000)—**"English Embroidery from the Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1580-1700: 'Twixt Art and Nature."** The late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries saw an efflorescence of the art of stitchery, not only in richly decorated apparel and accoutrements—caps, jackets, purses, cushions—but also in pictures rendered in "raised work," or high relief. Panels glittering with gold and silver filaments contemplate Biblical homilies, magnify the majesty of the Tudors and the Stuarts, and illustrate the marvels of the natural world. A mirror frame in raised work depicts a winged basilisk and a dromedary; a pouch made to hold the Royal Seal of George I sculpts the heraldic lion and unicorn in thread. Pattern books, workboxes, and a video from the conservation lab show how it was all achieved. Through April 12. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 11 to 5, and Thursday evenings until 8.)

DRAWING CENTER
35 Wooster St. (212-219-2166)—**"Apparently Invisible: Selections Spring 2009."** Opens Feb. 20. (Open Tuesdays through Fridays, 10 to 6, and Saturdays, 11 to 6.)

FRICK COLLECTION
1 E. 70th St. (212-288-0700)—**"Masterpieces of European Painting from the Norton Simon Museum."** Through May 10. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 5.)

INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY
1133 Sixth Ave., at 43rd St. (212-857-0000)—**"Weird Beauty: Fashion Photography Now."** Through May 3. ♦ **"This Is Not a Fashion Photograph."** Through May 3. ♦ **"Edward Steichen: In High Fashion."** Through May 3. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, and Saturdays and Sundays, 10 to 6, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

MORGAN LIBRARY & MUSEUM
225 Madison Ave., at 36th St. (212-685-0008)—**"On the Money: Cartoons for *The New Yorker*."** Through May 24. ♦ **"The Thaw Collection of Master Drawings: Acquisitions Since 2002."** Through May 3. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10:30 to 5, Fridays, 10:30 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

NEW MUSEUM
235 Bowery, at Prince St. (212-219-1222)—**"Jeremy Deller: It Is What It Is, Conversations About Iraq."** Through March 22. ♦ **"Daria Martin: Minotaur."** Through March 8. ♦ **"Mathias Poledna: Crystal Palace."** Through March 8. (Open Wednesdays and weekends, noon to 6, and Thursdays and Fridays, noon to 10.)

P.S. 1 CONTEMPORARY ART CENTER
22-25 Jackson Ave., at 46th Ave., Long Island City (718-784-2084)—**"Kenneth Anger."** Opens Feb. 22. ♦ **"Jonathan Horowitz: And/Or."** Opens Feb. 22. ♦ **"Lutz Bacher: My Secret Life."** Opens Feb. 22. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, noon to 6.)

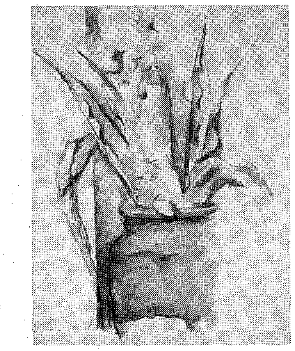
GALLERIES—CHELSEA

DAVID DIAO
Thirty-five paintings form an eloquent meditation on memory and loss. The show's title, "I lived there until I was 6 . . . ," refers to Diao's childhood home in China, which was confiscated by the Communists in 1949, an event that drove his family into exile. Diao reconstructs the lost time and place using maps, flags, Google Earth photographs, texts (both English and Chinese), and floor plans of the house, drawn by his relatives. A tennis court—there was one on the grounds of the house, and his father died in the midst of a game in New York—becomes talismanic, as do ginkgo leaves. Isolated phrases ("One suitcase per person") have the power of poetry as they conjure the tidal pulls of home. Through Feb. 21. (Postmasters, 459 W. 19th St. 212-727-3323.)

MATTHEW HIGGS
Higgs, a critic, curator, and d.j. as well as an artist, practices a guerrilla brand of readymade conceptualism—framing pages extracted from art books—that has never looked fresher or smarter than it does here. A catalogue cover embossed in an austere sans-serif font with the name of the proto-minimalist Tony Smith is flipped over so that the letters, now seen in reverse, become a cluster of modular forms. Two photographs of vintage books (shot by Higgs's wife, the artist Anne Collier) titled "Art in Crisis" and "Pictures in Peril" make winking reference to current conditions both aesthetic and economic. A third offers an inspired rejoinder: "Art Is to Enjoy." Through Feb. 21. (Murray Guy, 453 W. 17th St. 212-463-7372.)

SHINICHI MARUYAMA
Maruyama, a Japanese photographer now based in New York, creates sensational abstract images of what is essentially Action painting in midair, frozen with the aid of advanced strobe-light technology. His only materials are black ink and water, almost always seen in collision against stark white backgrounds. The results are calligraphic, erotic, and elegant, not unlike James Nares's big, liquid brushstroke paintings, but with echoes of Harold Edgerton and Adam Fuss as well. Maruyama shares the gallery with Aaron Siskind, and, like him, brings spontaneity and control into perfect balance. Through March 7. (Silverstein, 535 W. 24th St. 212-627-3930.)

STEPHEN SHAMES
Shames, whose photographs of Black Panthers were shown here in 2007, makes another strong impact with pictures collected under the title "Childhood & Youth." The eighty-seven black-and-white photographs, taken between 1968 and 2005, are as tough and unapologetic as their subjects—young activists, and kids smoking pot, shooting dope, and sniffing glue. His shots of teen hustlers in Times Square were made in the early eighties, when Larry Clark stalked the same sidewalks. Both photographers are drawn to rebels and outlaws, not as voyeurs but as witnesses with outsider streaks of their own. Through Feb. 21. (Kasher, 521 W. 23rd St. 212-966-3978.)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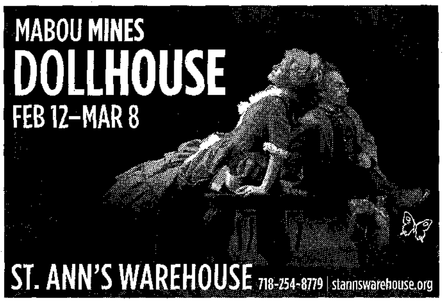
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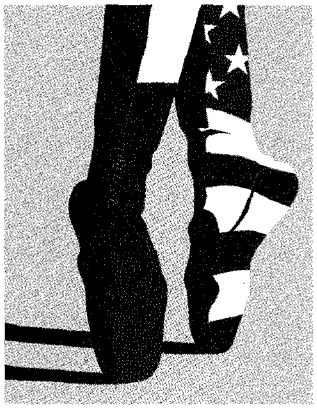
CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
OLD-TIME RELIGION

People always say that George Balanchine created his style of ballet—which is now, largely, the American style of ballet—by speeding up and reënergizing the old, plump Russian style that he learned as a child in St. Petersburg. On Feb. 22-23,



DANIEL HERTZBERG

as part of the Guggenheim's "Works & Process" series, Suki Schorer will try to explain what that means. Schorer, a revered teacher at Balanchine's School of American Ballet, has written books on his technique, and her lecture-demonstrations on the subject are famous. At this one, S.A.B. students will do Russian and then Balanchinean classroom exercises. They will perform the "Nutcracker" pas de deux in a Russian version and then in Balanchine's version. We can't really know for certain what Balanchine was taught as a boy in the nineteen-tens. Schorer has consulted with Irina Kolpakova, once a leading Kirov ballerina (now a coach at American Ballet Theatre), but she was trained in the nineteen-forties. By then, things would have changed. Never mind. This is probably the closest we're going to get.

—*Joan Acocella*

"LIGHT/DARK"
In this sensitively curated group show, the most basic elements of black-and-white photography are also the subtlest. The approaches and the materials are radically different, but nearly all the works edge into abstraction. Among the standouts are Go Sugimoto's white-on-white images of curled or floating paper, as evanescent as breath on glass. Michelle Kloehn's tintypes are more substantial, but their subjects are mysterious—equal parts science and magic. Working with antique glass-plate negatives of astronomical phenomena (eclipses, exploding galaxies, shooting stars), Linda Connor conjures deep space as an astonishing dreamscape of diamond dust and rings of fire. Through Feb. 21. (Sepia, 148 W. 24th St. 212-645-9444.)

Short List

RICHARD ALDRICH: Bortolami, 510 W. 25th St. 212-727-2050. Through Feb. 28. **LOTHAR HEMPEL / EBERHARD HAVEKOST:** Kern, 532 W. 20th St. 212-367-9663. Through March 14. **THOMAS HIRSCHHORN:** Gladstone, 530 W. 21st St. 212-206-7606. Through May 2. **ELLSWORTH KELLY:** Marks, 522 W. 22nd St. and 523 W. 24th St. 212-243-0200. Through April 11. **PIERO MANZONI:** Gagosian, 555 W. 24th St. 212-741-1111. Through March 21. **MIKA ROTTENBERG:** Klagsbrun, 526 W. 26th St. 212-243-3335. Through Feb. 28. **JOSH SMITH:** Luhring Augustine, 531 W. 24th St. 212-206-9100. Through March 14. **LISA YUSKAVAGE:** Zwirner, 533 W. 19th St. 212-727-2070. Opens Feb. 19. **ANDREA ZITTEL:** Rosen, 525 W. 24th St. 212-627-6000. Through March 7.

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

JANE SOUTH
If Piranesi had been a cartoonist, he might have designed something along the lines of South's architectonic sculptures, made of cut and folded paper, painted industrial shades of pink and gray, or fire-hydrant red. Layers of latticework, augmented by shadows, crimping, and delicate brushstrokes, lend the works an almost Op-art buzz. The show's centerpiece is also its literal high point—a madcap birdcagelike tower that reaches the gallery's sixteen-foot ceiling. South's sculptural follies seem to simultaneously celebrate and mourn the constructed wonders of the world. Through Feb. 21. (Spencer Brownstone, 39 Wooster St. 212-334-3455.)

"THE BRAND NEW HEAVIES"
This show of works by three promising young artists was curated by a fourth, the rising star Mickalene Thomas. Jessica Ann Peavy's trio of video projections follow three hip protagonists—two speaking directly to the camera, one spied while cooking a meal. The sound is hard to hear, but Peavy's palette—now bright, now moody—and her intimately held shots compel attention. Photographic portraits by Deana Lawson—a sad, sinewy woman on a patterned couch; a vintage hair-products advertisement enlarged to movie-poster scale—are close in spirit to Peavy's. Lauren Kelly, however, occupies a world apart, animating a tale of love and longing with Barbies and scatological twists of plasticine. Through March 8. (Blanchard, 26 Clinton St. 917-639-3912.)

Short List

ERICA BAUM: Dispatch, 127 Henry St. 212-227-2783. Through March 22. **FRANCESCA DIMATTIO:** Salon 94 Freemans, 1 Freeman Alley. 212-529-7400. Through March 9. **PETER DOIG:** Brown, 620 Greenwich St. 212-627-5258. Through March 14. **JACOB DYRENFORTH:** Renwick, 45 Renwick St. 212-609-3535. Through March 7. **JASON FOX:** Blum, 99 Wooster St. 212-343-0441. Through March 7. **JACOB KASSAY:** Eleven Rivington, 11 Rivington St. 212-982-1930. Through March 29. **BRUCE NAUMAN:** Freeman, 560 Broadway, at Prince St. 212-966-5154. Through Feb. 21. **SETH PRICE:** Spaulings, 165 East Broadway. 212-477-5006. Through Feb. 22.

DANCE

NEW YORK CITY BALLET
The "Founding Choreographers II" program opens with Balanchine's glittering Verdi underwater fantasy, "Ballo della Regina," a bravura piece originally made to showcase the talents of the fleet-footed Merrill Ashley. Then comes Balanchine's "Robert Schumann's 'Davidsbündlertänze,' " an exploration of the composer's turbulent relations with the world, and "Glass Pieces," a bracingly modern work by Jerome Robbins from the eighties. ♦ Feb. 18 at 7:30, Feb. 20 at 8, and Feb. 21 at 2: "Ballo della Regina," "Robert Schumann's 'Davidsbündlertänze,' " and "Glass Pieces." ♦ Feb. 19 at 8: "Slice to Sharp," "Hallelujah Junction," "A Simple Symphony," and "Mercurial Manoeuvres." ♦ Feb. 21 at 8 and Feb. 22 at 3: "Concerto Barocco," "Oltremare," and "Tchaikovsky Suite No. 3." ♦ Feb. 24 at 7:30: "Swan Lake," "The Steadfast Tin Soldier," "Romeo and Juliet," and "Slaughter on Tenth Avenue." (David H. Koch, Lincoln Center. 212-721-6500. Through March 1.)

ASPEN SANTA FE BALLET
This excellent contemporary-ballet company brings its diverse repertoire to the Joyce. (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Feb. 17 at 7, Feb. 18 at 7:30, Feb. 19-21 at 8, and Feb. 22 at 2 and 7:30.)

"TAOUB"
Groupe Acrobatique de Tanger, a troupe of Moroccan street acrobats, performs at the New Victory, directed by Aurélien Bory. (209 W. 42nd St. 646-223-3010. Feb. 18 at 2, Feb. 19-20 at 7, Feb. 21 at 2 and 7, and Feb. 22 at noon and 5.)

HILARY EASTON + COMPANY
The 92nd Street Y Harkness Dance Festival opens with man versus nature, in Easton's "The Reclamation," one of her trademark text-and-movement thematic dramatizations. The actors Steven Rattazzi and Jean E. Taylor represent humanity, vying for space against a company of plants and mute forest creatures. Anna Kiraly adds black-and-white video of clouds, branches, and blood cells; Thomas Cabaniss's score conjures storms. Though Easton's text is vivid, the ideas are a little too obvious, the choreography a little too gentle for the life-and-death stakes of the subject. (Ailey Citigroup, 405 W. 55th St. 212-415-5500. Feb. 18-19 and Feb. 21 at 8 and Feb. 22 at 2.)

LAURA PETERSON CHOREOGRAPHY
"Forever" gets a delayed début at Dance New Amsterdam. Peterson, a young choreographer with a strong visual sense, seats her audience around a white circular stage. The dancers, in monochromatic outfits, execute subtly shifting patterns of geometric clarity, an abstraction of a kaleidoscope. (280 Broadway, at Chambers St. 212-279-4200. Feb. 18-21 at 8 and Feb. 22 at 3.)

NEW YORK FLAMENCO FESTIVAL
This year, in the festival's customary balance of experimental and traditional, the experimental carries the status of a classic. The Antonio Gades Company brings a twenty-fifth-anniversary production of the late choreographer's "Carmen," at once a story ballet and a modernist abstraction. Unlike Gades's masterpiece, "Blood Wedding," "Carmen" was a Carlos Saura film before it was a stage work, and it suffers some in translation. Performances by the Gypsy dynasty Los Farruco are, in every way, more direct. Conceived by the family heartthrob, Farruquito, who won't be joining his clan (he's out of prison but not crossing the Atlantic yet), their program offers the traditional range of a multi-generational gathering: the raw firepower of youth, and the tact and depth of age. (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. Feb. 19 at 7:30, Feb. 20-21 at 8, and Feb. 22 at 3.)

JODI MELNICK AND BURT BARR
Melnick's dancing is crisp, layered, infinitely detailed. At the Kitchen, she and the visual artist Barr present a new work, "Fanfare," a solo for Melnick set within a sculptural installation by Barr. She will also present a version of "Suedehead," from last year, backed by two other highly accomplished dancer-choreographers, Vicky Shick and Juliette Mapp. (512 W. 19th St. 212-255-5793, ext. 11. Feb. 19-21 at 8.)

"SOUNDCHECK"
The American Tap Dance Foundation presents two programs. One pairs a piece by Barbara Duffy, a

sharp choreographer venturing riskily into thematic territory, with the proven physical comedy of Parallel Exit's "Time Step." The other combines "Tapsploitation," a search for identity that the voluptuous powerhouse Michaela Marino-Lerman sets on the mean streets of the seventies, with the Afro-Cuban sophistication of Max Pollak's RumbaTap. (Judson Memorial Church, 55 Washington Sq. S. 800-838-3006. Feb. 19-20 at 8.)

LAVA

Sarah East Johnson's troupe of impressive, endearing, I-am-woman acrobats visits the Brooklyn Lyceum. Their latest creation, "We Become," a piece about sharing small spaces, is distinguished by an original score courtesy of Toshi Reagon, as well as a rainbow design scheme by Nancy Brooks Brody. (227 Fourth Ave. For tickets, visit www.brownpapertickets.com. Feb. 19-20 at 8 and Feb. 21-22 at 7. Through March 1.)

CUNNINGHAM BEACON EVENT

This is the sixth in a series of dance "events" by the Merce Cunningham Dance Company held at Dia:Beacon. Cunningham, nearing ninety, is still vital, though confined to a wheelchair. Seen up close—this time in the Dan Flavin gallery—his dancers reveal tremendous strength, delightful detail, and even a touch of wit. (Beacon, N.Y. 845-440-0100, ext. 45. Feb. 21-22 at 2.)

"WORKS & PROCESS"

At the Guggenheim, Suki Schorer, a teacher at the School of American Ballet, will discuss Balanchine's innovations in ballet technique, with illustrations of exercises and repertory works by current students; two rising company dancers, Tiler Peck and Andrew Veyette, will also perform Balanchine's showstopping "Tchaikovsky Pas de Deux." (Fifth Ave. at 89th St. 212-423-3587. Feb. 22-23 at 7:30.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC

OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA

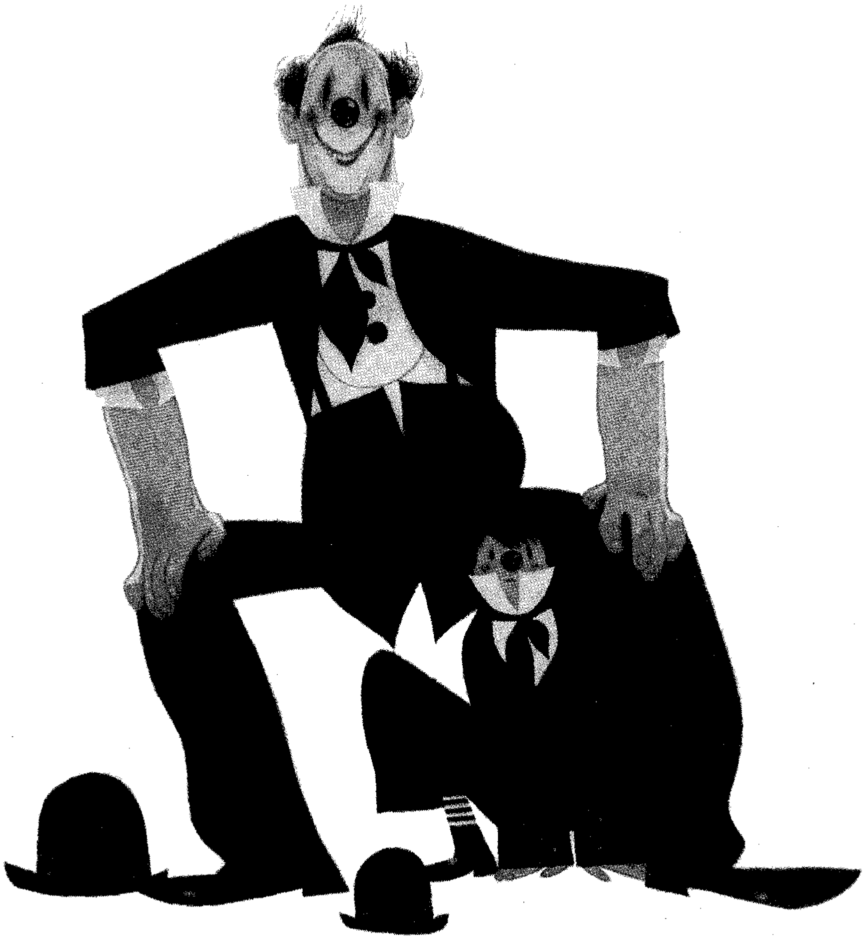
Robert Carsen's enchanting production of Tchaikovsky's **"Eugene Onegin"** returns with Karita Mattila as Tatiana, Piotr Beczala as Lenski, and Thomas Hampson in the title role; the renowned Czech conductor Jiri Belohlávek is on the podium. (Feb. 18 and Feb. 21 at 8.) ♦ People who have problems with **"La Rondine"** (is it opera, or operetta?) are thinking too hard. It's light, limpid, and lovely—as if Puccini had written "State Fair." Its sophisticated Parisian setting, however, is splendidly brought to life by Angela Gheorghiu (singing "Chi il bel sogno di Doretta"), Lisette Oropesa, Marius Brenciu, and a new addition to the cast, Giuseppe Filianoti. Marco Armiliato conducts with friendly authority, and everyone goes home happy. (Feb. 19 and Feb. 23 at 8.) ♦ A much anticipated new production, by David McVicar, of **"Il Trovatore,"** featuring Sondra Radvanovsky, Dolora Zajick, Marcelo Álvarez, and Dmitri Hvorostovsky; Gianandrea Noseda. (Feb. 20 and Feb. 24 at 8.) ♦ Historically, the Met has dusted off Cilea's **"Adriana Lecouvreur"**—the most elegant of the old verismo chestnuts—for its most popular divas, but this time around the show's raison d'être is the tenor Plácido Domingo, who is celebrating the fortieth anniversary of his Met début, in this very production. A protean singer by any standard, Domingo still has the sizzle and swagger to portray Maurizio, the aristocratic playboy. As the rivals for his affection, the soprano Maria Guleghina and the mezzo Olga Borodina tear into the score with voluptuous vocalism; Marco Armiliato. (Feb. 21 at 1.) ♦ Thomas Hampson hosts the Met's annual National Council Grand Finals Concert, the country's leading showcase for budding vocal talent; Patrick Summers conducts the Met Orchestra. (Feb. 22 at 3.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

GOTHAM CHAMBER OPERA: "L'ISOLA DISABITATA"

For Neal Goren's fine little group, the two-hundredth anniversary of Haydn's death coincides with the seasonal absence of one of New York's two major companies, and Goren has hired none other than Mark Morris to fill the vacuum, giving him directorial carte blanche over this 1779 comedy. Takesha Meshé Kizart, Valerie Ogbonnaya, Vale Rideout, and Tom Corbeil take the opera's four roles. Allen Moyer designed the sets; Goren conducts. (John Jay College, Tenth Ave. at 58th St. 212-279-4200. Feb. 18 at 7:30 and Feb. 21 at 8. Through Feb. 28.)

DICAPO OPERA: "SARKA"

Janáček's first opera, a Bohemian legend about a fearsome maiden warrior who succumbs to the charms of love, wasn't performed until 1925, after his more sophisticated later operas had already made his name. Written in the nineteenth century, it receives its U.S. première in the twenty-first, as the enterprising professional company mounts four staged performances; Oliver Gooch conducts. (Dicapo Opera Theatre, 184 E. 76th St. 212-288-9438. Feb. 19 at 7:30 and Feb. 21 at 8.)



Lorenzo Pisoni co-wrote and stars in "Humor Abuse," at Manhattan Theatre Club.

ANNETTE MARNAT

AMERICAN SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA: OPERAS BY LUIGI DALLAPICCOLA

Like the late George Perle, Dallapiccola (1904-75) was a disciple of Alban Berg, bringing an unlikely but welcome lyricism and human warmth to the rigors of twelve-tone technique. His intense anti-Fascism is evident in two of his one-act operas, **"Volo di Notte"** ("Night Flight," after the novel by Saint-Exupéry) and the powerful **"Il Prigioniero"** ("The Prisoner"); Leon Botstein conducts them in concert performances at Avery Fisher Hall. (212-721-6500. Feb. 20 at 8.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC

On their way out of town for a national tour, Lorin Maazel and his orchestra make a visit to Carnegie Hall—the conductor's last as music director. Feb. 17 at 8: One of the glories of the Maazel discography is his Deutsche Grammophon recording of Ravel's one-act opera **"L'Enfant et les Sortilèges,"** which combines the rambunctious charm of childhood and the rueful wisdom of age. In this concert performance, Susanne Mentzer is the Child, heading a cast that also includes Celena Shafer, Kate Lindsey, and Philippe Castagner; after intermission comes another Ravel favorite, the ballet "Daphnis et Chloé" (complete). ♦ Feb. 18 at 8: The engaging pianist Jean-Yves Thibaudet joins the orchestra in an early-twentieth-century program featuring Barber's "School for Scandal" Overture, Gershwin's Concerto in F, and Stravinsky's "Rite of Spring." (212-247-7800.)

AMERICAN COMPOSERS ORCHESTRA

George Manahan conducts the intrepid ensemble in five world-première works, by Margaret Brouwer ("Breakdown," a one-act opera collaboration with the video artist Kasumi), Rand Steiger, David Schiff, Katie Agócs, and Fang Man ("Resurrection," a clarinet concerto, with Derek Bermel). (Zankel Hall. 212-247-7800. Feb. 20 at 7:30.)

ORCHESTRA OF ST. LUKE'S

Roberto Abbado conducts an all-Mozart program at Carnegie Hall: the Piano Concerto No. 15 in B-Flat Major (with Andreas Haefliger), along with the "Haffner" and "Jupiter" Symphonies. (212-247-7800. Feb. 22 at 2.)

RECITALS

GAIL ARCHER: MUSIC BY MENDELSSOHN

With her 2008 cycle of Messiaen performances now finished, the acclaimed American organist moves on to one of 2009's birthday boys, who wrote copiously for her instrument. This recital, at St. Paul's Chapel, offers Mendelssohn's Sonatas Nos. 2 and 3, along with music by Schumann, Brahms (the

Eleven Chorale Preludes, his last composition), and Reger. (Columbia University, Amsterdam Ave. at 117th St. 212-854-0480. Feb. 18 at 7:30.)

CAROL MONTPARKER

A fine week for keyboard recitals continues with a seventieth-birthday celebration concert by the admired musician and writer, who performs works by Bach (from Book II of the Well-Tempered Clavier), Chopin, Beethoven, and Schumann (the Fantasy in C Major) at Carnegie's Weill Recital Hall. (212-247-7800. Feb. 19 at 8.)

SIMONE DINNERSTEIN

Dinnerstein, the pianist's pianist of Generation X, offers her only New York recital this season at the Metropolitan Museum, bringing her smart and lyrical style to music by Bach (the Fifth French Suite), Webern, Schumann ("Kreisleriana"), and Philip Lasser. (Fifth Ave. at 83rd St. 212-570-3949. Feb. 19 at 8.)

BARGEMUSIC

Feb. 20 at 8: Even early music has a place on the barge now. Asteria, a quietly charismatic duo made up of the soprano Sylvia Rhyne and the lutenist and tenor Eric Redlinger, offers "Un Très Doulx Regard," a little banquet of music from the Burgundian *ars nova* (1390-1440). ♦ Feb. 21 at 8 and Feb. 22 at 3: The classics return, courtesy of the violinist Mark Peskanov, the cellist Adrian Daurov, and the pianist Jeffrey Swann, who perform piano trios by Haydn (the "Gypsy"), Mozart, and Schubert (No. 2 in E-Flat Major). (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083.)

ALICE TULLY HALL OPENING CONCERTS

The wait is over: the old room, beloved but flawed, has been thoroughly reimagined by Diller Scofidio + Renfro (in association with FXFowle), and will finally show off its acoustical properties. Feb. 22 at 5: A host of prominent musicians—including the gambist Jordi Savall, the pianist Leon Fleisher, the Emerson String Quartet, and members of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center—celebrate with works by Bach, Stravinsky (the Octet), and Bartók. ♦ Feb. 22 at 9: Savall and his ensemble Hespèrion XXI stay for a late-night concert "dialogue" blending music from Afghanistan, Egypt, the Balkans, and points in between. (212-721-6500.)

CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER: "COMING HOME"

The Society—for whom Alice Tully Hall was built—returns to its refurbished residence, performing a celebratory program featuring works by Bach, Mendelssohn, and Beethoven (the Septet), along with world premières by William Bolcom and George Tsontakis. (212-875-5788. Feb. 24 at 7:30.)

MOVIES OPENING

ELEVEN MINUTES

A documentary, directed by Michael Selditch and Rob Tate, about a fashion designer's preparation for a runway show. Opening Feb. 20. (Angelika Film Center.)

FIRED UP

In this comedy, directed by Will Gluck, two high-school boys go to cheerleader camp in order to meet girls. Opening Feb. 20. (In wide release.)

KATYN

Andrzej Wajda directed this drama, about the massacre of fifteen thousand Poles by Soviet forces in 1940. Opening Feb. 18. (Film Forum.)

MADEA GOES TO JAIL

Tyler Perry wrote, directed, and stars in this comedy, about an elderly woman who is arrested after leading the police on a high-speed chase. Opening Feb. 20. (In wide release.)

MUST READ AFTER MY DEATH

A documentary, directed by Morgan Dews, about Dews's grandmother and the audiovisual family archive she left behind. Opening Feb. 20. (Quad Cinema.)

NOW PLAYING

THE CLASS

Extraordinary. François Bégaudeau, a teacher in a Paris public school in the Twentieth Arrondissement, published a novel in 2006 chronicling a year in his classroom. Along with the director Laurent Cantet and the writer Robin Campillo, he then condensed and reshaped the material into a two-hour drama centering on the teacher (Bégaudeau, playing himself) and a small number of students (all played by actual students, though not the same ones he wrote about). Bégaudeau, who is in his thirties, is handsome, lean, and quick, with a strong voice; his slouching or rowdy fourteen-year-olds are mostly of African or Caribbean descent—still outsiders in France, and rightfully touchy about it. Some of them are resistant to education, which disrupts the pleasures of adolescence, and Bégaudeau aggressively comes after them, challenging, correcting, teasing, criticizing. The students are alive to him and come back hard, questioning French notions of discipline and manners. In all, "The Class" is a prime document of French post-colonial blues, though its relevance to American urban education could not be any greater if it had been shot in the Bronx or Trenton or South Los Angeles. In French.—*David Denby* (Reviewed in our issue of 12/22 & 29/08.) (In limited release.)

CONFESSIONS OF A SHOPAHOLIC

The promising premise, from Sophie Kinsella's novels, of a young, clothing-obsessed journalist who schemes to get a job at a fashion magazine while fending off debt collectors, is sunk beyond salvage by the principals' leaden attempts at whimsy. The director, P. J. Hogan, doesn't find the balance between comic realism and slapstick antics; the real auteur, the costume designer Patricia Field, styles the movie beyond fashion, to the point of absurdity; and Isla Fisher, as Rebecca, the journalist, is a sinkhole of energy and never conveys the spontaneity and cleverness that are the character's hallmark. (The far livelier Krysten Ritter, as Rebecca's roommate, steals all the scenes they share.) The most interesting part of the story—the connection between pop culture and the addictions it so avidly monetizes—is buried beneath a truckload of taffeta.—*Richard Brody* (In wide release.)

CORALINE

Henry Selick directed this animated adaptation of Neil Gaiman's darkly delicious fairy tale, about a young girl who discovers an alternate universe where her home life is mirrored in spectacular fashion—and where, for a while, her every whim is satisfied. It's a twisted take on "Alice in Wonderland," and Selick (who also wrote the screenplay) has devised a brilliant stop-motion environment for Gaiman's tale, giving it a sophisticated and deliriously eccentric presentation. The film moves beautifully from the title character's sensitive concerns (she feels neglected at home) to the creepy excitement of living in a world that traps you with its gifts. The outstanding score, by Bruno Coulais, has the tempo of a nursery rhyme gone bad, and the voice work (by Dakota Fanning, Teri Hatcher, and Jennifer Saunders, among many others) is as stylish and impeccable as the rest of Selick's wonderful creation.—*Bruce Diones* (In wide release.)

THE CURIOUS CASE OF BENJAMIN BUTTON

A child is born in New Orleans in 1918 with the features and internal organs of an old man; then, as time passes, his age declines until he goes through late middle age, middle age, youth, and so on, back toward infancy and death. This science-fiction reverse-aging conceit, from an early F. Scott Fitzgerald story, has been rendered by the writer Eric Roth and the director David Fincher with a fanatical literalness that occasionally touches the uncanny but that often feels laborious and even pedantic. As Benjamin becomes younger, he turns into the handsome, fortyish Brad Pitt, and he has an affair with a vibrant, normally aging dancer (Cate Blanchett). They meet in the middle, so to speak, but the relationship is odd, since, instead of the fervent memories of youth, Benjamin has only the relief that he is no longer a crotchety old man. He's bland; he's Brad Pitt. There is much else, about New Orleans, the sea, and many other things, but the movie is an attenuated folly.—*D.D.* (2/9 & 16/09) (In wide release.)

THE FRONTIER OF DAWN

The intense romanticism of Philippe Garrel's new drama arises both from its story of love unto death and from the director's self-revealing artistry. The passionate relationship between François (Louis Garrel, the director's son), a photographer, and Carole (Laura Smet, the daughter of Johnny Hallyday and Nathalie Baye), the actress he's hired to take pictures

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TABLES FOR TWO
TXIKITO

JESSIE WENDER

240 Ninth Ave., at 25th St. (212-242-4730)—First, the obligatory name exegesis: it's pronounced "chee-kee-toe," meaning "little" in Euskara, the Basque language. People make a big deal over the tic-tac-toe phonetics—"All I ask is that you name the restaurant something that's a little easier to pronounce and spell," Ed Levine wrote, on the Web site Serious Eats—but is Txikito really any trickier to say than La Grenouille, or 'Cesca? And isn't it more exciting to order a *txiki txanpi* than a mini shrimp-and-mushroom grilled cheese? New Yorkers, at least, seem to think so. "It's no surprise that its long front bar and cozy seating area fills up fast," according to Zagat, however you say that.

Txikito serves small plates, divided into three categories. There are *beroak*, which are hot items; *hotzak*, which are cold items (O.K., that's confusing); and *pintxoak*, which are Basque finger foods—little spreads and sandwiches that are traditionally, though not here, held together with toothpicks. (*Pincho* means "thorn" in Spanish.) They're just bites, and almost all of them are, along with a glass of cinnamony *zurra*, a tantalizing way to start a meal. The best is *arraultza*, a round of baguette topped with sofrito, chorizo, and a perfectly fried quail egg: deli breakfast on a dollhouse scale. The *hotzak* section is weaker, with the exception of octopus carpaccio, spiced with red pepper and beautifully carved to resemble an open chrysanthemum, or fish scales. Skip the insubstantial escarole salad, for eleven dollars; the poached Navarran leeks with chopped egg and an undetectable black-truffle vinaigrette; the forgettable green beans. It's not that there's anything wrong with them, but at these portions and prices—it's at least six plates to a full stomach—a lacklustre dish feels like a squandered opportunity, especially when the *beroak* portion of the menu offers so many special things: beef tongue, ground blood sausage wrapped in pastry, a couple of preparations of salt cod, flash-fried shrimp. There are trotters with tripe—honeycombed, fetid, strictly for the adventurous. *Txipiron*, or "squid ribbons," taste more like pasta than like seafood, and are as delicate as tendrils of Spanish moss, for which, blessedly, there is no Basque equivalent. (Open Tuesdays through Fridays for lunch, and Tuesdays through Sundays for dinner. Dishes $5-$20.)

—*Lauren Collins*

of, is also that of the director's camera with the actress. The cinematographer William Lubtchansky's silken black-and-white images caress, with a transcendently chaste sense of rapture, every trait of Smet's luminous face: her clear skin, sparkling eyes, arched hairline, and classical lips. When circumstances pry Carole and François apart, the plot enters the familiar realm of *l'amour fou;* even in her absence, the actress remains an indomitable force in the photographer's life. Within the modernistically shattered framework of conventional melodrama, Philippe Garrel conveys an extravagant, heartfelt blend of tenderness, pain, and longing. In French.—*R.B.* (Film Society of Lincoln Center; Feb. 22.)

FROST/NIXON

In its transfer from stage to film, Peter Morgan's account of David Frost's lengthy set of interviews with Richard Nixon in 1977, three years after he resigned the Presidency, has taken on an aura of momentousness unwarranted by the event itself. Frank Langella's performance provides considerable insights into Nixon's intelligence, caginess, and fraudulent sentimentality, and Michael Sheen makes Frost into a toothy, bright, shallow but smart showman-journalist. The interviews themselves, always absorbing, build to Nixon's climactic admission that he let the country down during the Watergate crisis. The media whirl of negotiation, advisers, preparation, and so on is engaging enough, but the episode itself changed nothing. It was a journalistic coup, not a historical milestone, and the filmmakers don't seem to realize that. Directed by Ron Howard.—*D.D.* (12/8/08) (In wide release.)

MEDICINE FOR MELANCHOLY

The director Barry Jenkins's first feature doesn't get beyond the level of good intentions. The story, set in San Francisco, concerns Micah (Wyatt Cenac) and Joanne (Tracey Heggins), who slept together drunk without knowing each other's name and begin to get acquainted the morning after. Jenkins's ambition is to fuse romance with politics, private affairs with public ones; like him, the two lead actors and the characters they play are African-American, and the movie makes much of it. Joanne's unseen boyfriend, she reports, is white, and Micah reproaches her for it and puts a great deal of effort into raising her ethnic consciousness. He takes her to the Museum of the African Diaspora, complains about how few blacks there are in his chosen "indie" milieu, and rails against gentrification. Unfortunately, the politics come off as editorializing and the relationship is flat and script-bound. Jenkins evinces no eye for visual melody and tricks up the images by leaching out most of the color, hinting at meaning but achieving merely a greeting-card cuteness. His French New Wave references only highlight the audacity and inventiveness that his movie lacks.—*R.B.* (Cinema Village.)

MILK

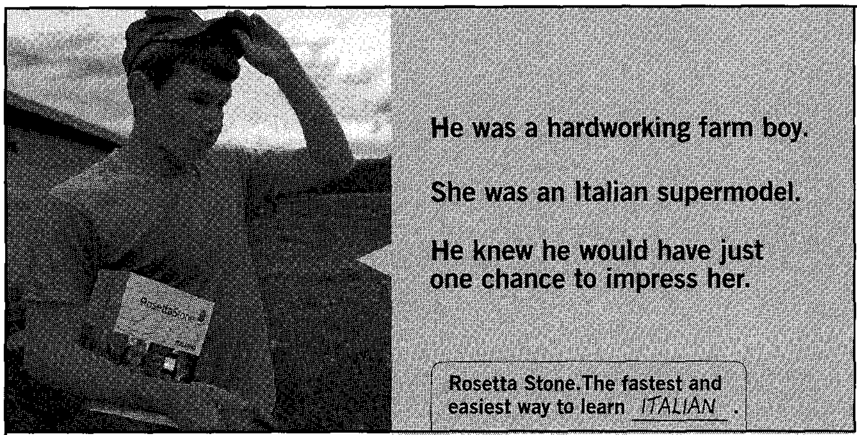
Gus Van Sant's vibrantly entertaining bio-pic recreates, without starchiness, the San Francisco life of the gay activist and politician Harvey Milk (Sean Penn), who was assassinated in 1978, along with Mayor George Moscone, by a fellow-politician, the family-values conservative Dan White (Josh Brolin). The righteous march of events is warmed by the banter, the casual sex, and the candor of the gay milieu in the giddy seventies, the period just before AIDS, when life was free and easy. Much of the time, Penn keeps his voice down, but the fervor and humor are there in the most offhanded moments. Without ostentation, he creates a new body, a new temperament: he loosens his neck and shoulders and swivels his head; his smile is enormous and all-embracing; he holds an elbow out and pumps a forearm up and down like a semaphore as Harvey speaks in public. Brolin, a slab of hair lying low across his forehead, gives White a brick-headed, baffled manner, a tormented neediness. In the filmmakers' interpretation, there's a suggestion that White suffered from murderously repressed homosexuality.—*D.D.* (12/1/08) (In wide release.)

PAUL BLART: MALL COP

Kevin James must be feeling the love now that his latest film—about an overweight security guard who encounters a bunch of hapless thieves holding hostage a crowd of shoppers at a West Orange, New Jersey, mall—has turned out to be a smash hit. The movie is divided into two parts: the first is a sitcom-like look at Paul Blart's home life (he's a single dad with a daughter); the second is a semi-inventive comic take on the "Die Hard" movies, as James uses his surprisingly spry bulk to rescue the hostages. The story stays in family-friendly territory (there are no raunchy jokes or lessons about conspicuous consumption), and most of the mindless nonsense of the script (which James co-wrote with Nick Bakay) passes pleasantly, thanks to the rotund sweetness of James's performance. Directed by Steve Carr.—*B.D.* (In wide release.)

THE READER

The British director Stephen Daldry made a splash with "The Hours," and this new film is no less worthy, ambitious, and exasperating. The screenwriter, once again, is David Hare, who fillets the best-selling novel by Bernhard Schlink. For all Hare's expertise, however, we are stuck with the unsavory pretensions of the original tale. Kate Winslet plays Hanna, who, thirteen years after the Second World War, works on the trams in Neustadt, West Germany, and has occasional sex with a local teen-age boy named Michael (David Kross). Their first time, though lingeringly shot, has all the finesse of cheap porno; where else does a woman tell a lusty youth to shed his clothes and take a bath because he has dirt on his face? In the movie's second half, we see Hanna being tried and imprisoned for her wartime deeds; there is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a shocking revelation, which comes as no surprise; and the middle-aged Michael (Ralph Fiennes) turns up to help his onetime love. Daldry takes things painfully slowly, not helped by a sappy score, and we are encouraged to muse upon the cultural shortcomings, or even improvements, in the life of an aging member of the S.S. This is not an issue that most of us feel the need to worry about. With a strong performance, late in the day, from Lena Olin.—*Anthony Lane* (12/15/08) (In wide release.)

SEVENTEEN

Working with lightweight camera rigs that they developed themselves, Jeff Kreines and Joel DeMott (who is female) approach the subjects of their documentary—working-class teen-agers in Muncie, Indiana—man to man and woman to woman. The immediacy is refreshing, and shocking. As searing as it is rambunctious, this film brings out class prejudices that American movies rarely confront. But the focus is on what's important to the kids—the flirtation and double-daring and risk-taking that extend from school hallways to the streets, the partying that occurs when the parents aren't home, and the rowdy get-togethers that take place even when they are. The white girls lead relatively elastic lives (they even date black boys); the white boys are hell-raising mini-machos. Released in 1983.—*Michael Sragow* (Film Society of Lincoln Center; Feb. 22.)

SLUMDOG MILLIONAIRE

An eighteen-year-old Muslim tea-boy named Jamal (Dev Patel), born and raised in the poverty of Mumbai, teeters on the verge of fame and fortune. A nation awaits. Such is the old-fashioned, sentimental cliffhanger to which the screenwriter Simon Beaufoy and the director Danny Boyle have, with unembarrassed drive, committed themselves. Jamal is a contestant on the Indian edition of "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?," and the suspicion of the police—who, in an ill-judged prelude to the story, hold and torture him—is that he must have cheated. His response is that experience alone, whether wretched or comic, has by chance furnished him with the correct answers, and the bulk of the film, constructed from flashbacks, proves his point. The style, seen previously in "City of God" and other movies, is what you might call urban-manic: heated performances, even hotter colors, and camerawork that vies with the editing for nerve and speed. The lad at the center of it all is actually on the dull side, but the energy around him—not least in the dance sequence over the final credits—is difficult to resist.—*A.L.* (11/24/08) (In wide release.)

TAKEN

Liam Neeson plays a divorced father and former C.I.A. employee, who lives in Los Angeles to be near his immensely annoying teen-age daughter (Maggie Grace). When she is kidnapped on a trip to Paris, he tracks her down, taking the opportunity to combine his two favorite cultural interests: tender paternal love and indiscriminate homicide. First, he slaughters the Albanians who stole her, before moving on to the Arabs who want to buy her, and you feel quite sure that he would, if required, slash and thump his way through the rest of the alphabet. For those with a taste for political allegory, there is something to ponder here, although the director, Pierre Morel, together with his producer (and co-writer) Luc Besson, takes things at such a clip that little room is left for contemplation. The result is unrelenting, improbable, and humorless; Neeson, as domineering as ever, shades his feats of aggression with a solemn gravity that they scarcely deserve, and anyone raised on "An American in Paris" will weep to think how far we have travelled from Gene Kelly. That was a fantasy of international ease; this is a bad dream of revenge. With Famke Janssen.—*A.L.* (2/2/09) (In wide release.)

THE THIRD GENERATION

The Baader-Meinhof Gang's attacks provide the backdrop for Rainer Werner Fassbinder's hectic, funny, prismatically intricate political thriller, from 1979. The tone is set by lurid green credits that pulsate to the sound of a heartbeat as a high-rolling businessman (Eddie Constantine), in a chilling modern office high above Berlin, works with his assistant (Hanna Schygulla), who turns out to be a mole from a revolutionary cell that is plotting spectacular crimes. The teeming cast of characters includes a cynical police detective (Hark Bohm) whose son (Udo Kier) is one of the plotters, and a drug addict (Y Sa Lo) who brings an ex-con and former Army explosives specialist (Günther Kaufmann) into the group. Slapstick comedy (including a game of keep-away with a volume of Bakunin) and oddball habits (the terrorists dress like prewar gangsters and play Monopoly) contrast with wild visions (as when the detective tells the businessman his dream "that capitalism invented terrorism to force the state to protect it better"). The intertitles are taken from bathroom graffiti, the cinematic references (to Bresson, Tarkovsky, and, especially, Godard) are apt and clever, and the few action scenes are filmed with a razor-sharp pulp efficacy. Fassbinder's blend of paranoia and whiz-bang wonder is the modern successor to Fritz Lang's "Dr. Mabuse" films. In German.—*R.B.* (Film Society of Lincoln Center; Feb. 21 and Feb. 24.)

Also Playing

FANBOYS: In wide release. **HE'S JUST NOT THAT INTO YOU:** In wide release. **THE PINK PANTHER 2:** In wide release. **THE UNINVITED:** In wide release.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES

32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—"Essential Cinema." Feb. 19 at 7: "Tom, Tom, the Piper's Son" (1969, Ken Jacobs). ♦ Feb. 20 at 7: "Intolerance" (1916, D. W. Griffith; silent). ♦ Feb. 21-22 at 6 and Feb. 22 at 8: "The Passion of Joan of Arc" (1927, Carl Theodor Dreyer; silent).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS

30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4100)—"Best of the African Diaspora Film Festival." Feb. 20 at 3 and Feb. 23 at 6:50: "Paloma Delight" (2006, Nadir Moknèche; in French and Arabic). ♦ Feb. 20 at 6: "Made in Jamaica" (2006, Jérôme Laperrousaz). ♦ Feb. 20 at 9, Feb. 22 at 6:50, and Feb. 24 at 9:40: "Gospel Hill" (2007, Giancarlo Esposito). The Feb. 22 and Feb. 24 screenings will be followed by a Q. & A. with the director. ♦ Feb. 21 at 2 and Feb. 22 at 9:30: "Complexion" (2008, Vandon Gribbs). ♦ Feb. 21 at 4 and Feb. 24 at 4:30: "Prince of Broadway" (2008, Sean Baker), followed by a Q. & A. with the director. ♦ Feb. 21 at 7 and Feb. 23 at 4:30: "Hit for Six" (2007, Alison Saunders-Franklyn). ♦ Feb. 21 at 9:30: "Naked Acts" (1998, Bridgett Davis), followed by a Q. & A. with the director. ♦ Feb. 22 at 4:30 and Feb. 25 at 6:20: "The End of Poverty?" (2008, Philippe Diaz).

FILM FORUM

W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—In revival: Two films by Jean-Luc Godard. Feb. 18-24 at 1, 4:30, and 8: "Two or Three Things I Know About Her" (1966; in French). ♦ Feb. 18-24 at 2:45, 6:15, and 9:45: "Made in U.S.A." (1966; in French). ♦ Through March 5: "Breadlines and Champagne," Depression-era movies. Feb. 18 at 1, 4:30, and 8: "Black Legion" (1936, Archie Mayo). ♦ Feb. 18 at 2:40, 6:10, and 9:40: "Black Fury" (1935, Michael Curtiz). ♦ Feb. 19 at 1:30, 5:10, and 8:50: "Vitaphone Rarities," a short-film program. ♦ Feb. 19 at 3:30 and 7:10: "Hallelujah, I'm a Bum" (1933, Lewis Milestone). ♦ Feb. 20 at 1:30, 4:40, and 7:50: "Dead End" (1937, William Wyler). The 7:50 show will be introduced by Amy Lehr, the director's granddaughter. ♦ Feb. 20 at 3:20, 6:30, and 9:45: "Three on a Match" (1932, Mervyn LeRoy). ♦ Feb. 21 at 1:30, 4:50, and 8:10: "Blood Money" (1933, Rowland Brown). ♦ Feb. 21 at 2:50, 6:10, and 9:30: "Scarface" (1932, Howard Hawks) and newsreels from Hearst Metrotone News. ♦ Feb. 22 at 1:30, 5:20, and 9:30 and Feb. 23 at 2:50: "It Happened One Night" (1934, Frank Capra). ♦ Feb. 22 at 3:30 and 7:20 and Feb. 23 at 1 and 4:50: "Bombshell" (1933, Victor Fleming). ♦ Feb. 24 at 1, 4:55, and 9: "Ex-Lady" (1933, Robert Florey). ♦ Feb. 24 at 2:20, 6:15, and 10:20: "Female" (1933, Curtiz). ♦ Feb. 24 at 3:35 and 7:30: "Mills of the Gods" (1934, Roy William Neill). ♦ Special event. Feb. 23 at 7:30: A discussion with the singer Marni Nixon.

FILM SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER

Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center (212-875-5610)—"Faded Glory: Oscar Micheaux and Black Pre-War Cinema." Feb. 18 at 4: "Cabin in the Sky" (1943, Vincente Minnelli). ♦ Feb. 18 at 6:30: "The Flying Ace" (1926, Richard Norman; silent). ♦ Feb. 19 at 2 and 8:30: "Hallelujah!" (1929, King Vidor). ♦ Feb. 19 at 6:15: "Within Our Gates" (1920, Micheaux; silent). ♦ "Film Comment Selects." Feb. 20 at 3:30: "A Woman in Berlin" (2008, Max Färberböck; in German). ♦ Feb. 20 at 6:30: "Paradise" (2009, Michael Almereyda), followed by a discussion with the writer Jonathan Lethem and the director. ♦ Feb. 20 at 9:15 and Feb. 22 at 1: "The Mugger" (2007, Pablo Fendrick; in Spanish). ♦ Feb. 21 at 1:30 and 8:30: "The Tiger's Tail" (2006, John Boorman). ♦ Feb. 21 at 3:45 and Feb. 24 at 6:15: "The Third Generation" (†). ♦ Feb. 21 at 6: "The Chaser" (2008, Na Hong-jin; in Korean). ♦ Feb. 22 at 2:30: "Demon Lover Diary" (1980, Joel DeMott). ♦ Feb. 22 at 4:30: "Seventeen" (†). ♦ Feb. 22 at 7: "The Frontier of Dawn" (†). ♦ Feb. 24 at 8:30: "Revanche" (2008, Götz Spielmann; in German). ♦ Special screening. Feb. 23 at 6:30: "Reassemblage" (1982, Trin T. Minh-Ha) and "Behind the Veil" (1969, Eve Arnold).

FRENCH INSTITUTE ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE

Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—Through March 2: The films of Jacques Doillon. Feb. 24 at 12:30, 4, and 7:30: "The Fifteen-Year-Old Girl" (1989; in French).

IFC CENTER

323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—Through April 5: "After the Revolution: Cuba on Screen." Feb. 20-22 at 11 A.M.: "The Siberian Mammoth" (2005, Vicente Ferraz; in Spanish). ♦ "Waverly Midnights." Feb. 20-21: "Crash" (1996, David Cronenberg). ♦ "Stranger Than Fiction," a documentary series. Feb. 24 at 8: "Intimate Stranger" (1991, Alan Berliner).

JAPAN SOCIETY

333 E. 47th St., at First Ave. (212-715-1258)—Through March 1: "Shinjuku Ecstasy: Independent Films from the Art Theatre Guild of Japan." All films are in Japanese. Feb. 18 at 7:30: "Throw Away Your Books, Let's Go Into the Street" (1971, Shuji Terayama). ♦ Feb. 20 at 7:30: "Funeral Parade of Roses" (1969, Toshio Matsumoto). ♦ Feb. 21 at 3: "Death by Hanging" (1968, Nagisa Oshima). ♦ Feb. 21 at 5:30: "Silence Has No Wings" (1966, Kazuo Kuroki). ♦ Feb. 22 at 3: "Eros Plus Massacre" (1970, Kiju Yoshida). ♦ Feb. 24 at 7:30: "The Inferno of First Love" (1968, Susumi Hani).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—"Still Moving." Feb. 18-20 at 1:30: "The Searchers" (1956, John Ford). ♦ "Documentary Fortnight 2009." Feb. 19-20 at 6: "Barcelona or Death" (2007, Idrissa Guiro). ♦ Feb. 19 at 8: "A Horse Is Not a Metaphor" (2008, Barbara Hammer). ♦ Feb. 20 at 6: "Alchemy" (2007, Eva Bakkeslett) and "Eternal Mash" (2007, Catherine van Campen; in Dutch), followed by a discussion with the directors and the festival executive Candida Paltiel. ♦ Feb. 20 at 8:30 and Feb. 22 at 1:30: "The Face of a Woman" (2008, Andrew Irvine) and "Bachelorette, 34" (2008, Kara Herold). The Feb. 20 screening will be followed by a discussion with the directors. ♦ Feb. 21 at 6:30: "Where Do I Belong?" (2007, Mahvash Sheikholeslami; in Farsi). ♦ Feb. 21 at 8:30 and Feb. 22 at 5:30: "The Art Star and the Sudanese Twins" (2008, Pietra Brettkelly). The Feb. 21 screening will be followed by a discussion with the director. ♦ Feb. 22 at 2:30: "Mental" (2008, Kazuhiro Soda; in Japanese), followed by a discussion with the director. ♦ Feb. 22 at 6: "Neither Memory nor Magic" (2007, Hugo Perez), followed by a discussion with the director and readings of poetry by Miklós Radnóti. ♦ Feb. 23 at 7: "Profit Motive and the Whispering Wind" (2007, John Gianvito).

NEW-YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY

170 Central Park W., at 77th St. (212-712-7237)—"The Silent Clowns Film Series." Feb. 20 at 2: "The General" (1927, Buster Keaton; silent).

RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART
150 W. 17th St. (212-620-5000)—"Cabaret Cinema." Feb. 20 at 9:30: "Defending Your Life" (1991, Albert Brooks), introduced by Sloane Crosley.

READINGS AND TALKS

KGB BAR
Mike Heppner and Joshua Furst read from their fiction. (85 E. 4th St. No tickets necessary. Feb. 22 at 7.)

BARNES & NOBLE
The poet Elizabeth Alexander reads from her work and talks about her appearance at Barack Obama's Inauguration. (33 E. 17th St. No tickets necessary. Feb. 24 at 7.)

"GLOBAL CORRESPONDENCES"
André Aciman, Edward Albee, Kwame Anthony Appiah, Ron Chernow, Lydia Davis, Deborah Eisenberg, Nathan Englander, Janet Malcolm, Francine Prose, Sarah Ruhl, and other writers read from their work at a benefit for the literary journal *PEN America*. (The Great Hall, Cooper Union, 7 E. 7th St. 212-868-4444. Feb. 24 at 7.)

192 BOOKS
Sarah Houghteling offers selections from her début novel, "Pictures at an Exhibition." (192 Tenth Ave., between 21st and 22nd Sts. For reservations, which are required, call 212-255-4022. Feb. 24 at 7.)

QUEENS COLLEGE
The novelists Peter Carey and E. L. Doctorow join the critic James Wood (who writes for this magazine) to discuss how fiction works. Leonard Lopate is the moderator. (LeFrak Concert Hall, the Music Building, Flushing. For more information, visit www.qc.edu/readings. Feb. 24 at 7.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

GREENWICH VILLAGE ANTIQUARIAN BOOK FAIR
In the fair's thirtieth year, some sixty East Coast dealers display first editions, maps, prints, and paper ephemera, in a sale to benefit P.S. 3, which was founded in 1971 and is affectionately, if anachronistically, known as the "hippie school." (490 Hudson St., between Christopher and Grove Sts. Feb. 20, from 6 to 9; Feb. 21, from noon to 5; and Feb. 22, from noon to 4. For more information, visit www.gvabf.org.)

"DIVINAMENTE NEW YORK"
This five-night festival (a spinoff of a gathering in Rome), organized by the Italian actress Pamela Villoresi, explores spiritual themes through art. It opens on Feb. 21 at 8, with a concert at the Asia Society (725 Park Ave.) titled "Sacred Sounds," featuring the Tibetan singer Yungchen Lhamo, and includes, on Feb. 23 at 7:30, the performance of a play in English addressing a priest's concerns about the existence of God, called "Il Curato e il Pagliaccio" ("The Priest and the Clown"), at La Mama E.T.C. (74A E. 4th St.), and a bilingual rendition, on Feb. 26 at 8, of "La Matassa e la Rosa," an oratorio dedicated to Edith Stein, the martyred Jewish convert to Catholicism who died at the hands of the Nazis, starring Villoresi, at Middle Collegiate Church (50 E. 7th St.). (For more information about the festival, including a complete schedule, visit www.divinamentenyc.org. Feb. 21-26.)

"EINSTEIN'S DREAMS"
John Tracy Egan, Gregg Edelman, Alison Fraser, Kate Shindle, and other leading lights of Broadway perform a concert version of a new musical based on Alan Lightman's 1993 novel of the same name, which takes a fanciful view of the scientist's thoughts prior to the publication, in 1905, of his theory of relativity. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400. Feb. 23 at 7:30.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES
While Christie's Paris division auctions off the very grand collection of Yves Saint Laurent and his longtime partner, Pierre Bergé, its New York counterpart will be quiet; both of the big houses are taking a break this week, making room for two sales at **Swann.** First up is a selection of African-American fine art (Feb. 17), led by a work by the Chicago-born artist Charles White, "Move On Up a Little Higher," a charcoal-and-crayon drawing from 1961, which, in its swooshing lines and imposing figure, embodies the powerful sentiments of the gospel song for which it is named. Some of the earliest works in the sale are by Henry Ossawa Tanner, who studied with Thomas Eakins at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, and eventually became an expatriate in Paris (and a member of the Légion d'Honneur). On Feb. 19, Swann offers a selective group of a hundred photographs and photographic sets, including several albums of nineteenth-century expeditions to Mexico, Egypt, and the Holy Land, as well as an irresistible portrait of an all-American girl saluting G.I.s ("Mary Jo Seymore"), taken in 1944 by the Arkansas photographer Mike Disfarmer. (104 E. 25th St. 212-254-4710.)

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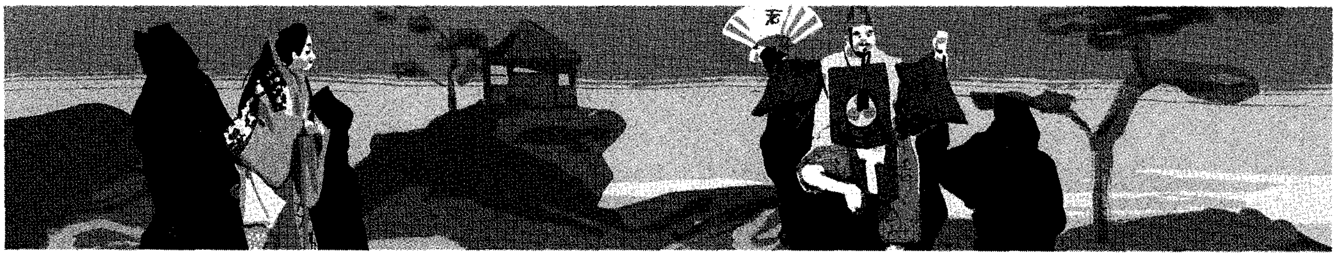
Visit the Goings On blog, at www.newyorker.com/go/goingson, for additional cultural coverage and commentary.



JEROEN KOOIHAAS

ON THE HORIZON

CLASSICAL MUSIC
SPEAK OF THE DEVIL
Feb. 27

The actor Klaus Maria Brandauer, who shot to fame in the 1981 film "Mephisto," narrates "The Soldier's Tale," by Stravinsky, in a concert by the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, one of the first in the new Alice Tully Hall. (212-875-5788.)

NIGHT LIFE
WESTERN WIND
March 5

The Los Angeles-based singer-songwriter Eleni Mandell follows in the tradition of X, Tom Waits, and other staunchly independent acts from her home town. She has a flair for colorful lyrics and a voice that conveys both loneliness and ecstasy. Mandell kicks off a national tour with a show at Joe's Pub. (212-967-7555.)

DANCE
SECRET LIFE
March 5-7

New Yorkers have caught glimpses of Bunraku—the traditional Japanese puppet theatre, in which each puppet is manipulated by three masked and hooded puppeteers—in opera productions ("Madama Butterfly," at the Met) and Basil Twist's "Petrushka," but the Japan Society brings the real thing, courtesy of the Awaji Puppet Theatre Company. (212-715-1258.)

MOVIES
DANISH MODERN
March 13-31

The Danish director Carl Theodor Dreyer made eight films from 1919 to 1926, all distinctive, none epochal. Between 1928 and 1964, he made only five features, but each is a classic, from "The Passion of Joan of Arc" to his austere yet ecstatic final work, "Gertrud." BAM offers the later masterworks and seven of his rare earlier films. (718-636-4100.)

ART
LIQUID MEASURE
March 27-July 5

The Impressionist Gustave Caillebotte had a lifelong passion for rowing and sailing. "Caillebotte: Impressionist Paintings from Paris to the Sea," at the Brooklyn Museum, will include scenes of regattas off the coast of Normandy, as well as drawings, models, and photographs of sailboats that the artist collected and designed. (718-638-5000.)

The Awaji Puppet Theatre Company, at the Japan Society.

DIARY OF A FOODIE

TUNE IN FOR A FRESH, NEW SEASON ON PUBLIC TELEVISION

Ruth Reichl,
Editor in Chief
John "Doc" Willoughby,
Executive Editor

Catch all-new episodes of *Gourmet's Diary of a Foodie,* the two-time James Beard Award-winning public television series. Travel the globe—from Tasmania and Hawaii to Oaxaca and Istanbul—and discover a feast of culinary trends, exotic ingredients, and food-obsessed personalities. Then, journey into the magazine's test kitchen with Editor in Chief Ruth Reichl and her renowned editors to learn how you can bring these techniques and flavors into your kitchen. Go to gourmet.com/diaryofafoodie to find out when *Gourmet's Diary of a Foodie* airs in your market. Visit condenaststore.com to purchase the box set of *Gourmet's Diary of a Foodie,* Season One.

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THE
NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

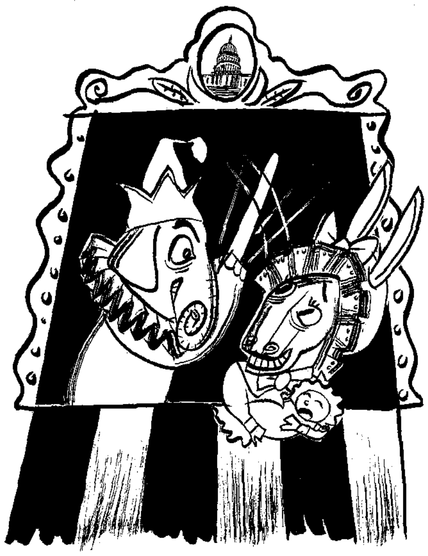
COMMENT
PARTISANSHIP, BY THE BYE

Throughout the fortnight-long Battle of the Stimulus Package—the Capitol Hill confrontation that culminates this week in a signing ceremony for a historically unprecedented piece of legislation that will inject more than three-quarters of a trillion dollars' worth of adrenaline into America's fluttering economic heart—one question preoccupied commentators and observers, especially those desperate for relief from the daunting substance of the matter: was President Obama being "bipartisan" enough?

Some discussed the question calmly, others less so; but there was something like a consensus that if non-trivial numbers of Republican legislators failed to support the stimulus bill the fault, and the obloquy, would be Obama's. "The bill will be judged a political success not simply if it becomes law, but if it's deemed 'bipartisan,' " ABC's "The Note" Web site warned. The Los Angeles *Times*, while calling the bill's quick passage in the House of Representatives a "big legislative victory" for Obama, cautioned that "it was clear that his efforts so far had not delivered the post-partisan era that he called for in his inauguration address." (The man had been in office for eight days—a tight schedule for era-delivering.) On the Senate floor, the remarks of Lindsey Graham, of South Carolina, provided evidence that an age of perpetual political peace had not yet dawned. "This bill stinks!" Senator Graham exclaimed. And:

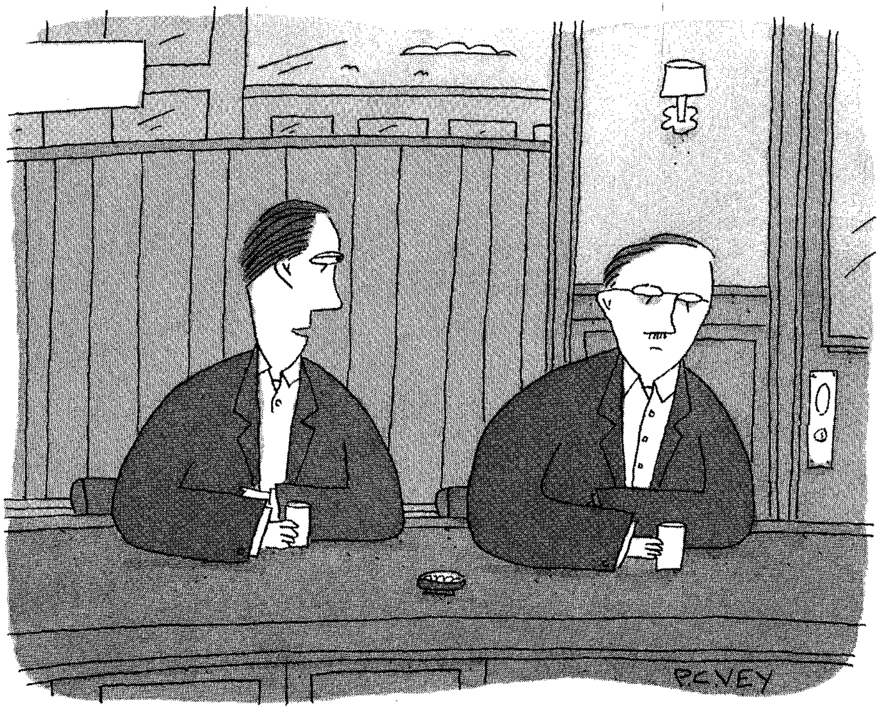
> The process that's led to this bill stinks! . . . There is no negotiation going on here! Nobody is negotiating! We're making this up as we go! The polling numbers are scaring the hell out of everybody, and they're in a panic! They're running from one corner of the Capitol to the other to try to cobble votes together to lower the cost of the bill to say we solved the problem! This is not the way you spend a trillion dollars!

The "process," admittedly, was a hurried one; it had to be, what with the banking system frighteningly close to collapse, the economy in its deepest crisis since the nineteen-thirties, and job losses, which approached three million last year, accelerating to more than a half million a month. Still, the President found time for cordiality, inviting Republicans from both Houses of Congress to join him for cocktails, a Super Bowl party, and more cocktails. Nor was his "outreach" purely social. "This was not a drive-by P.R. stunt, and I actually thought it might be," Zach Wamp, of Tennessee, told the *Times* after he and his Republican House colleagues finished a long session with the President. "It was a substantive, in-depth discussion with our conference." More to the point, the bill they were discussing had already been tailored to soothe Republican sensibilities. It included tax cuts as well as direct spending, and its size, however huge by normal standards, was not even half the output—two trillion dollars—that the recession is expected to drain from the economy in the next two years.



After the Senate passed the stimulus, which Sean Hannity, on Fox News, denounced as "the European Socialist Act of 2009," Mitch McConnell, the Senate Republican leader, pronounced it "a dramatic move in the direction of indeed turning America into Western Europe." Whether or not greater income equality, better health, and fewer prisons would really be a dystopian nightmare, McConnell's vision of "the Europeanization of America" has already come true in a way that bears directly on the question of "bipartisanship": what might be called America's parliamentary parties have come to resemble their disciplined European counterparts. As recently as the nineteen-sixties, for reasons of history

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL



"I finally feel I can accept the things I'm too lazy to change."

• •

and origins, the Democrats were a stapled-together collection of Southern reactionaries, big-city hacks, and urban and agrarian liberals; the Republicans were a jumble of troglodyte conservatives, Yankee moderates, and the odd progressive. Ideological incoherence made bipartisanship feasible. The post-civil-rights, post-Vietnam realignment, along with the gerrymandered creation of safe districts, has given us—on Capitol Hill, at least—an almost uniformly rightist G.O.P. and a somewhat less uniformly progressive array of Democrats.

In 1981, President Reagan's tax cuts passed with the help of forty-eight cross-party votes in the House and thirty-seven in the Senate. Obama's stimulus got zero and three, respectively. (Getting those three—a practical necessity, thanks to the scandalous routinization of the filibuster—precipitated the vote-cobbling scramble that Senator Graham was hyperventilating about.) Last week's sudden withdrawal, under Party pressure, of Judd Gregg, a conservative Republican senator from New Hampshire, as Obama's nominee for Secretary of Commerce was another signal that Hill Republicans have opted for total war. But this does not mean that Obama's hopes for bipartisanship have been entirely in vain. A Gallup poll taken last week found twenty-eight per cent of Republican voters (and fifty-six per cent of independents) backing the stimulus. It had the support not only of the labor federations but also of the National Association of Manufacturers and the United States Chamber of Commerce. And four Republican governors—California's Arnold Schwarzenegger, Connecticut's Jodi Rell, Florida's Charlie Crist, and Vermont's Jim Douglas—joined fifteen of their Democratic colleagues in signing a letter calling for its enactment. A Republican governor, you might say, is sort of like a Republican congressman—except with actual responsibilities.

At the President's first full-scale news conference last week, two of the thirteen questions were about bipartisanship. As usual, Obama took the long view. The American people, he said, "understand that there have been a lot of bad habits built up here in Washington, and it's going to take time to break down some of those bad habits." His overtures to Republicans "were not designed simply to get some short-term votes. They were designed to try to build up some trust over time." At the same time, he was firm about his "bottom line," which,

> when it comes to the recovery package, is: send me a bill that creates or saves four million jobs, because everybody has to be possessed with a sense of urgency about putting people back to work, making sure that folks are staying in their homes, that they can send their kids to college. That doesn't negate the continuing efforts that I'm going to make to listen and engage with my Republican colleagues. And, hopefully, the tone that I've taken, which has been consistently civil and respectful, will pay some dividends over the long term.

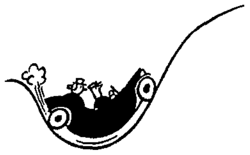
Asked what he had learned from the stimulus tussle, Obama said again that "old habits are hard to break," and added:

> Now, just in terms of the historic record here, the Republicans were brought in early and were consulted. And you'll remember that, when we initially introduced our framework, they were pleasantly surprised and complimentary about the tax cuts that were presented in that framework. Those tax cuts are still in there. I mean, I suppose what I could have done is started off with *no* tax cuts, knowing that I was going to want some, and then let them take credit for all of them. And maybe that's the lesson I learned. But there was consultation. There will continue to be consultation.

Fifty years ago, the civil-rights movement understood that nonviolence can be an effective weapon even if—or especially if—the other side refuses to follow suit. Obama has a similarly tough-minded understanding of the political uses of bipartisanship, which, even if it fails as a tactic for compromise, can succeed as a tonal strategy: once the other side makes itself appear intransigently, destructively partisan, the game is half won. Obama is learning to throw the ball harder. But it's not Rovian hardball he's playing. More like Gandhian hardball.

—*Hendrik Hertzberg*

HERE TO THERE DEPT.
A BETTING WOMAN



After Barack Obama won the Presidency, Jean Kennedy Smith—the eighth of Joseph and Rose Kennedy's nine children, who had supported Obama, despite having served as Ambassador to Ireland under Bill Clinton—had some celebrating to do. She chatted with her brother Teddy. She revelled with some close friends. Eventually, she fished a scrap of paper out of her wallet and dialled a number scrawled on it, which connected her to a Washington, D.C., cabdriver named Jean Claude Excellent.

Excellent was dropping off a fare at Dulles when his cell phone rang. The other day from his cab, with the open-door alert chiming in the background, he recalled, "She said, 'Do you remember the lady—?' and I said, 'Who lady?' and she said, 'The lady you take, remember we talk about Obama win or not going to win?' and I said, 'Oh, yes!' "

"I sure do remember you," Excellent went on. "I told all my friends, 'How'd that lady know? How was she so sure Obama was going to win?'"

Excellent and Smith had met only once, in January of last year. It was just after the Iowa caucuses, and Smith, who lives in New York, was in Washington for a board meeting at the Kennedy Center. Coming out of the Watergate, she got into Excellent's cab.

"You know when you're the cabdriver and people ask you a question?" Excellent said. "She asked, 'Which candidate do you like?' And I said, 'Oh, probably Mrs. Clinton.' And then after that she said, 'I think Obama can be President.' I said, 'What? I don't think we're able to see that.'"

Smith recalled, "I came out of the Watergate, and I said, 'It looks like our man's going to win,' and he said, 'Oh, no, I don't think so,' and I said, 'Oh, yes, he is,' and he said, 'No, he ain't.'"

"Look, I'll give you a hundred dollars if he doesn't win, and if he does, you can drive me around Washington for a day," Smith said.

"I will drive you around all *year* if Obama is even nominated to be a candidate!"

"O.K.!"

The bet agreed upon, Excellent got out a piece of paper and started writing down its terms: "J-E-A-N—"

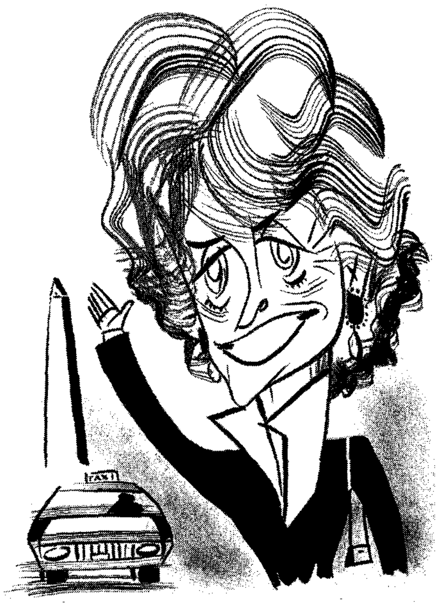
"How'd you know that was my name?" Smith said.

"That's *my* name! I'm Haitian."

Excellent gave Smith the chit and dropped her off at the airport.

"I tell all my friends about this bet I make," Excellent said. "I tell everybody, and some of them said that was the stupidest thing I've ever done. But I was not even thinking that Obama being President is something that can happen."

On Election Day, Smith watched the returns at her brother's house in Washington. Excellent was fixing the fan belt of his car, a '93 Crown Vic that had broken down in Columbia Heights, and he turned on the TV around ten. Despite his losing wager, he was celebrating. "It was, Oh, wow! I was so happy. My son is in the Navy—he went to Iraq, now he is going to Afghanistan—and I call him and we talk and I tell him, 'Man, don't give up. If Obama is going to be President, you never know!'"



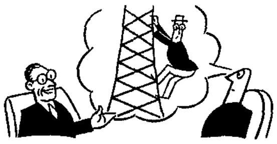
Jean Kennedy Smith

Excellent was driving on the Beltway, just before the Inauguration, when he heard from Smith. They exchanged congratulations on the Obama victory, and then turned to Smith's. She said, "It sounds a little heavy, you driving me around Washington all year, but you can pick me up from the airport next time I come to town."

"I love this lady! I have fun talking to her," he said, recently. He was eager to repay his debt. "She may be coming down soon and I will come pick her up," he said. "I think maybe even I can give her a hug."

—*Lauren Collins*

BRAVE NEW WORLD DEPT.
RABBIT EARS



The handoff of the White House seemed like a piece of cake next to America's transition from analog to digital TV signal. With the White House, you switch residents but get a lot of the same stuff: podiums, helicopters, tour groups. With the switch that is officially taking place in television transmitters around the country starting this week, you could wind up with frame skipping, frozen screens, or, worse, nothing (as in snow). Bill Beam, the engineer in charge of the signal that WABC-TV sends off the Empire State Building, said recently, "We don't know how it's all going to wind up." In the months leading up to the switchover, the city's anxious cable- and dishless citizens have been turning for answers to the Antenna King.

Lately, the Antenna King himself—a.k.a. Henry Langan—has not been in residence at the Antenna King headquarters, in the shadow of the Gowanus Expressway. Once, he ruled the rooftops of Brooklyn, Queens, Staten Island, and the Bronx, places where today there are still a few hundred thousand people using old-style antennas to watch "Dancing with the Stars." (The relatively wide-open vistas of the outer boroughs make them antenna-friendly; Manhattan, by comparison, is practically terra incognita to the Antenna King, save for a few satellite dishes.) Steven Langan, Henry's son, is in charge now. "I'm the Prince," Steven said the other day, at the Antenna King showroom.

"I'm afraid about the changeover, to be honest with you, because there's such confusion," he said. Calls from worried customers have been coming in, some looking for special digital antennas, which do not exist, some wondering if they should finally make the switch to cable, which the Antenna King can't help them with, or to satellite dish, which the Antenna King can.

Estimates of the number of viewers not prepared for the transition vary, but broadcasters have been worried that more people have been shifting from cable to antenna, owing to the economy. "These network guys are panicked because if the signal goes their ratings could go,” the Prince said, seated on a couch in the showroom, which contained a twenty-seven-inch TV playing a cartoon and getting so-so reception; a bunch of metal antenna poles; a space heater; and a busted display case. He explained that if you have cable or a satellite dish nothing will change for you. If you have an antenna (and a converter box), you will either get a picture or you won’t, depending on how clear the path is between your antenna and the Empire State Building, but if you do get the signal you will get the best picture of your TV-watching life. “But some people using rabbit ears in city housing are gonna have nothing,” he said.

Though the Langans still install rooftop antennas, their business is primarily exporting wireless cable antennas to the Middle East and Africa. Steven talked about his father’s non-antenna-related talents. “He’s the Antenna King, but he’s really an artist and kind of an inventor,” he said. Last month, a neighbor walked into the store, paged through one of the Antenna King’s sketchbooks, which was lying on a desk (the result of art classes he took at the Brooklyn Museum in the late nineteen-sixties), flipped past a detailed hand-drawn antenna ad captioned “$39.99 installed,” and pointed to a reclining nude. “That could be my wife!” he said.

As Steven Langan was relating this story, the Antenna King showed up with his wife, Rosanne Langan, the Antenna Queen. He is tall and gregarious, with a shock of silver hair and the stiff knees that come from climbing up to thousands of New York City roofs. As he began to hold forth, the Queen nodded silently, with an air that suggested that she had heard the King’s broadcasts on many occasions and understands that the signal is still strong. “The story of the Antenna King is an interesting story of how a man started a business and good fortune came along,” the Antenna King said.

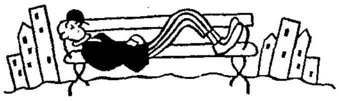
A synopsis: Born in pre-television Park Slope to a Ukrainian couple, name changed from Lappe, with a sister and two brothers, both stickball players. In the Army, the King was a telegraph operator, and afterward he opened a TV-repair shop in Sunset Park with a partner who preferred fishing. In 1967, the Antenna King was founded. “It was like going up into the sky and striking gold,” he said. In the eighties, he hired off-duty firemen to help put up all the dish antennas. In the nineties, when he was doing dish work for the U.N., the Iraqi Embassy tried (unsuccessfully) to pay him with a check, just before the first Gulf War. He did a dish for Bernie Madoff in the late nineties. (Before September, 2001, he said, he pointed antennas toward the transmitters in the World Trade Center.) Recently, he said, he was recognized at a Staples. “You’re the Antenna King!” a checkout clerk yelled.

Lately, he has been spending most of his time watching one television channel at home in Bay Ridge, where he picks up his analog signal not off the Empire State Building but on a bank shot off the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge. “I’m a PBS man, Channel 13,” he said.

At that, the Antenna Queen spoke up. “ ‘CSI,’ ” she said. “Love it.”

—*Robert Sullivan*

ON THE STREET
HEAD COUNT



Shortly before eleven the other night, a group of about a hundred volunteers shuffled into the overheated cafeteria of P.S. 191, on West Sixty-first Street, to gird themselves for a distinctive night on the town. They were about to set off to conduct the city’s seventh annual Homeless Outreach Population Estimate—to count the number of homeless people on the street—and the mood reflected a kind of nervous giddiness. “The reason we count the homeless is not because it’s fun and exciting,” Kristin Misner, who led the pre-survey briefing, said. “But still—it is!”

More than two thousand volunteers in all five boroughs participated, and they were instructed to follow a strict set of rules. In groups of four to six, the surveyors were to follow routes laid out on maps and ask every person they saw between midnight and 4 A.M. to answer the same handful of questions. “Even if they refuse to answer, you still have to fill out the answer to question six—it’s the most important question,” Misner told the group. “Do you believe that this person is homeless?”

After Misner’s high-spirited pep talk, Dr. Dova Marder, the medical director of the Department of Homeless Services, took the floor, and a more sombre tone. “We’ve called a Code Blue, level two, for tonight, because we expect a wind-chill of below twenty degrees,” she said. That meant that the volunteers were to offer a van ride to a shelter to anyone who wanted it. In the past year, five homeless people in the city have died because of cold weather—so, Marder warned, “please, err on the side of caution.” (The survey is conducted in winter because, it is assumed, only the truly homeless stay outside in cold weather.)

Just after midnight, Group Four trooped north to its assigned turf in the West Seventies. These were not exactly mean streets—the main peril in daytime is stroller gridlock in front of Fairway—and at first the cheerful vibe lingered. The group took literally the order to approach every single person on the street with the question “Tonight, do you have some place that you consider to be your home or a place where you live?” Yes, a series of bemused dog-walkers said, and so did the fellow getting into his BMW with New Jersey plates.

Group Four included two friends who worked together at a nonprofit legal-services organization, a social worker from New Jersey, a city employee and her husband, and Sister Nancy Downing, of the Congregation of Notre Dame, who is working at Covenant House, which assists homeless young people. The first hour or so provided little to hold Group Four’s attention. A hearse delivered a client to Riverside Memorial Chapel. “I guess that’s why they call it the dead of night,” Sister Downing said.

After one in the morning, as traffic thinned, the surveyors confronted their first dilemma when they saw a homeless man asleep on the steps of the West End Collegiate Church, at Seventy-seventh Street. The survey instructions said not to wake sleeping people but merely to mark them as homeless and move on. Yet the Code Blue suggested that everyone on the street should be offered the chance to come inside. After a sidewalk debate, the group decided to send two of their number to approach the sleeping man and offer him shelter. The man rejected the offer with a grunt and went back to sleep.

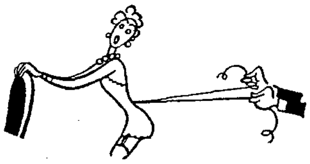
In recent years, the HOPE survey has found a continuing decline in homelessness in New York, but it’s unclear whether the economic crisis may push the numbers back up. (Group Four counted four homeless people that night; the over-all results will be announced soon.) After two o'clock, Group Four reached the First Baptist Church, on Broadway at Seventy-ninth Street. There a homeless man was walking back and forth in front of the newsstand, his head uncovered in the cold. He was unresponsive to the group's entreaties. Sister Downing called 911 to see if an ambulance crew might persuade the man to take shelter.

Three police cars converged on the corner, and the cops chatted briefly with the man. Then they drove away. "We know this guy—he's here most nights," one officer explained later to the group, with the rueful expertise of a resident, not a tourist, in the city of the night. "Sometimes he gets a bagel. Sometimes he gets arrested. This is just his life."

—*Jeffrey Toobin*

CASTING CALL

NAKED CITY



Back in January—the time of year when the flesh feels lumpiest, the hair dullest, the skin pastiest—the producers of Neil LaBute's "Reasons to Be Pretty," which moves to Broadway next month, held an open casting call, seeking "real people with real bodies" to appear as models in an ad campaign. The play "confronts America's obsession with physical beauty headlong," according to its promotional materials, but this was no Dove commercial. "It's a 'What the fuck?' campaign," Drew Hodges, the head of the advertising company in charge, said, referring to the reaction that people are supposed to have when they see the finished product—pictures of real people naked—on the subway. The posters will go up February 23rd, with the tagline "Does this play make me look fat?"

On audition day, more than a hundred hopefuls were packed into the tenth floor of a building off Broadway, where three casting directors—Bernie Telsey, Will Cantler, and Tiffany Little Canfield—sat at card tables studying lists of questions about body insecurities. (The play is about a couple whose relationship falls apart after the woman hears that her boyfriend has said she has a "regular" face.) "We're looking for people who pop," said Telsey, who has broad shoulders and loose, curly hair. "I say that whether I'm casting this or 'Wicked' or 'Rachel Getting Married.' "

Canfield—who has blond hair, full lips, and "would like to lose ten pounds"—was talking to a forty-something actress named Annie McGuire, who told her, "My favorite body parts are my feet," and to Brianna Stimpson, another aspiring actress, in a flowery dress. "If you had to pick a physical body part to change, what would it be?" Canfield asked. "Legs!" Stimpson said. "I want legs that go on forever—I want six feet of legs, and I have, like, three feet." Canfield asked for a favorite part. "Hmm," Stimpson said. "I like my face. I feel like, window to the soul, you know?" When she left, Canfield said, "There's nothing wrong with that girl's legs!"

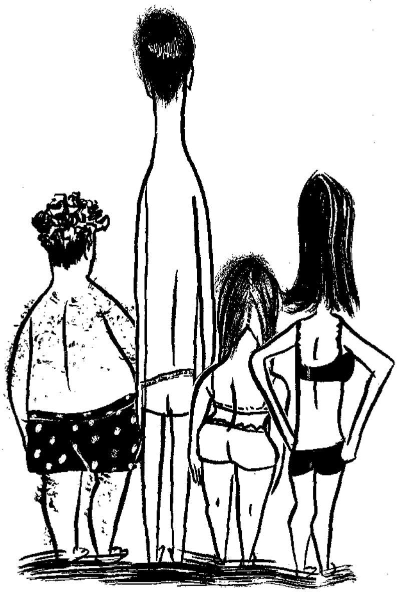
Nearby, Cantler (bald head, glasses—"I look shockingly like Ed Harris") was talking to a chubby actor named Ananias Dixon. "The part I'm most self-conscious about is my stomach and arms," Dixon said softly. "I've always been a big boy, and, especially in the theatre industry, it's all about looks. I don't go for relationships, because I'm afraid of being rejected." Telsey was interviewing Adrienne Gori, a skinny nineteen-year-old, who said, "I like guys with very good forearms. I think it's because I grew up on lumberjack land, in New Hampshire." Telsey asked for her least favorite body part, and Gori stuck her arms in the air: elbows. "They flare out." (One flared naturally; the other had been poorly set by a doctor after it was broken in a gym accident.) Next came a middle-aged woman with stretch marks ("Do you think they've ever gotten in the way of your own relationship?" "No"), a bearded improv actor ("I've got kind of an indented chest"), and a fiftyish blond Russian computer programmer, who said, in a gloomy voice, "I used to be beautiful. I'm not anymore." Then a grandmotherly woman named Barbara Helfgott told Telsey a long story that involved a man, a pair of flesh-colored underpants, and "a little floaty transparent jacket": "He walked in, took in the outfit, walked straight past me to the refrigerator, opened the refrigerator, and said, 'It's just as I thought—you don't have any fruit and vegetables in there.' "

It had been more than an hour. The casting directors took a break.

"This is depressing," Canfield said, when the doors were closed.

Telsey said, "Don't you feel like Oprah?"

Outside, in the waiting area, people were reading magazines. Tom Hedlund, a very tall man in an Argyle sweater, was chatting with Susan Brown, a curvy rocket scientist (Ph.D., M.I.T., environmental engineering). "We're talking about projecting sexuality in the workplace," Brown said. "I'm very voluptuous, and people think of me in a very sexy way, and it downplays the intellectual." She continued, "If I were to be a Playboy Bunny or reality-TV star, this would be a blessing. But what if you're a serious person?" She described a particularly painful crush. "This one guy in college—I was so shy, and I finally approached him, and he looked at me and was like, 'You've got the biggest breasts I've ever seen!' "



"If that was the first thing out of his mouth, you don't need him," Hedlund told her. Brown said that she wouldn't expect that Hedlund would have body issues, being so tall and thin, but Hedlund said that it was actually twice as hard for a tall guy to look in shape. "If I was six feet, I'd have it made," he said. "Man, I'd be buff and ripped."

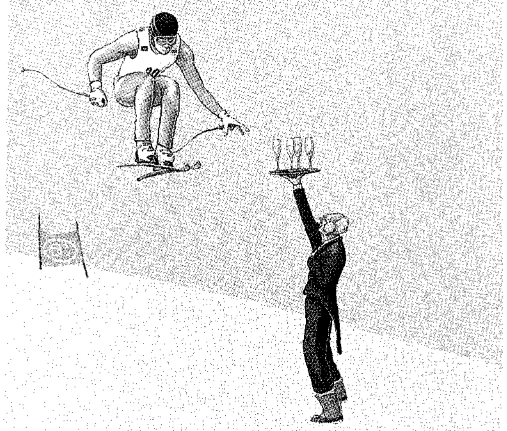
Eight people were selected for the subway ads, including Dixon (the chubby actor) and the bearded guy. Hedlund and Brown were not picked, but they did get together later.

—*Lizzie Widdicombe*

Advertisement

THE NEW YORKER
ON THE SLOPES
AT BEAVER CREEK

FEBRUARY 26–28



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"If I'd Saved, I Wouldn't Be Here"
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MUSICIAN
CHUCK MANGIONE
Friday, February 27

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PHOEBE IN WONDERLAND
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LETTER FROM MUMBAI

OPENING NIGHT

The scene from the airport slums.

BY KATHERINE BOO

Gautam Nagar is one of thirty-odd slums, comprising ninety thousand families, on land owned by the Airports Authority of India, in Mumbai. It is ten minutes by foot to the international terminal and is ringed by five of the city's smartest hotels. The hotels charge two hundred to a thousand dollars a night and are enclosed by high walls and barbed-wire fences, so their interactions with Gautam Nagar are primarily airborne. Music from weddings and poolside parties drifts over. Ash from cow-dung and wood fires drifts back. And every evening at precisely six-thirty a Hyatt sign lights up red and white, its glow not quite reaching the dirty screens of two video-game consoles in a tin-roof shed.

Anna, an elderly Tamil resident of Gautam Nagar who wears his loincloths very short, opened the game parlor last year. He quickly regretted the endeavor. Profits have slipped owing to the global recession, and, like businessmen the world over, he is now repositioning: converting the front of the game room into a stall for hot fried snacks. Food hygiene is more difficult at Anna's than it is at the Hyatt, since the air of Gautam Nagar is clotted with grit from a nearby concrete plant. So he covers his skillet with a sign, retrieved from a trash pile, that reads "Hotel InterContinental the Grand."

The uncertain future of the games in this evolving establishment concerns Sunil, a thirteen-year-old boy who works at the airport. He supports their survival as reliably as he is able: one rupee nightly in exchange for thirty minutes of Metal Slug 3. At dusk on January 22nd, as a parade of Mumbai women visited the hotel spas to get manicured, exfoliated, and blown out for that night's Indian première of "Slumdog Millionaire," Sunil was deriving a poor return on his one-rupee entertainment outlay. He was having his ass handed to him by a being even worse than the zombies and giant mutant crabs on his screen: a twelve-year-old gloater. "You're dead now," Sunil's rival cried, banging the joystick, making the bombed-out virtual city shake. "Everyone, come and see!" Sunil attempted to rally his Metal Slug man, firing a rocket-propelled grenade at an abandoned tank that provided cover for his enemy, as boys pressed in to watch him fail.

He didn't take the crowd's interest personally. Boys always crammed into Anna's. One reason was Anna himself: bald on top with snarls of silver hair on the rest of his body, something the children found consistently funny. More compelling, though, were the amenities: the games, two light bulbs, and a short metal bench. Sunil's home, in one of the many sumpy lanes behind the shop, lacked lights, water, and a place to sit, and every evening was enveloped in a stink so much worse than all the usual stinks at Gautam Nagar that people doubled over when they inhaled it. The cause was a truckload of rotting hotel food, dumped daily outside his home, which sustained three hundred feral pigs. He would have paid more than one rupee to breathe elsewhere.

Two older boys commandeered the second machine—sophisticates, with rusty bullet casings shoved into holes in their earlobes. This fashion caused infections, but was believed to be the American style.

"To kill me, you will have to do something bigger than this!"

"Take your rocket inside!"

"No, no—then they will throw that bomb."

"Bombs? All my bombs are gone—"

"Lost. Lost."

The sophisticates weren't as loud as the gloater, but as they played they hogged the bench. Out of principle, Sunil rose to yank it back. This put him further behind in the scoring, but, mentally, he had already deserted the mission: a dwindling interest that had less to do with bench hogs or the gloater than with his changing relationship to Metal Slug 3. Reverberations of the crisis in the American economy had recently driven him from work he liked—collecting garbage and selling it to recyclers—into work he didn't like. He had become a metal thief at the international airport, and now that he faced real daily dangers, without arms or armor, the rush of pretend dangers on video screens had diminished. He regretted not spending his rupee on Bomberman, the game selected by two younger boys who had taken his spot on the bench. The Bombermen had round heads and looked like toys, and circus music played when you exploded.

Worldly Indians like to call Mumbai, the financial capital, their country's New York City. That would make the airport area, in the suburbs, its Queens. Mumbai's Queens, though, has more glamour. Around the hotels, stands of sleek office buildings are multiplying rapidly; one of them is named simply More. Gautam Nagar is named after the eight-year-old son of a scavenger who succumbed to pneumonia after one of the periodic slum demolitions. The community consists of approximately a thousand human residents; seventeen water buffalo; goats, dogs, and pigs; and two white horses striped to look like zebras—the handiwork of a once fearsome slumlord, now gone batty. The primary industry here is the gathering of airport garbage for recycling—work made a little less miserable by expanded global markets and India's surging G.D.P. Over the past five years, there were enough water bottles, earbuds, Diet Coke cans, used tampon applicators, batteries, and copies of Indian *Vogue* to lift the majority of families over the World Bank's poverty line, which is currently twenty-two rupees a day in India's cities.

Jobs at the hotels would have lifted residents far higher, but management wanted people who spoke English, not just Hindi, Marathi, Tamil, Nepali, or any of the six or eight other languages spoken in the airport slums. Everyone knew that management also wanted people who were light-skinned; many Gautam Nagar residents are dark from work in the sun. Still, recycling had, over time, turned most of the slum's tarp roofs into tin ones, under which some families had laid down ceramic-tile floors. But last fall, when bank lending slowed worldwide, construction projects stalled, and the demand for recycled materials plummeted, Gautam Nagar's link to the global markets started pushing it backward.

"The banks in America went in a loss, then the big people went in a loss, then the scrap market in the slum areas came down, too" was how Anna, who read the Tamil-language newspapers, had explained the crisis to the residents. A kilo of empty water bottles, once worth twenty-five rupees, was now worth ten. This was how the crisis was understood.

Sunil had entered the garbage business when he was seven or so, after his mother died of tuberculosis. His father did roadwork when it was available,

Sunil, aged thirteen, near his home in the Gautam Nagar slum, where a thousand people live. Photograph by Chiara Goia.

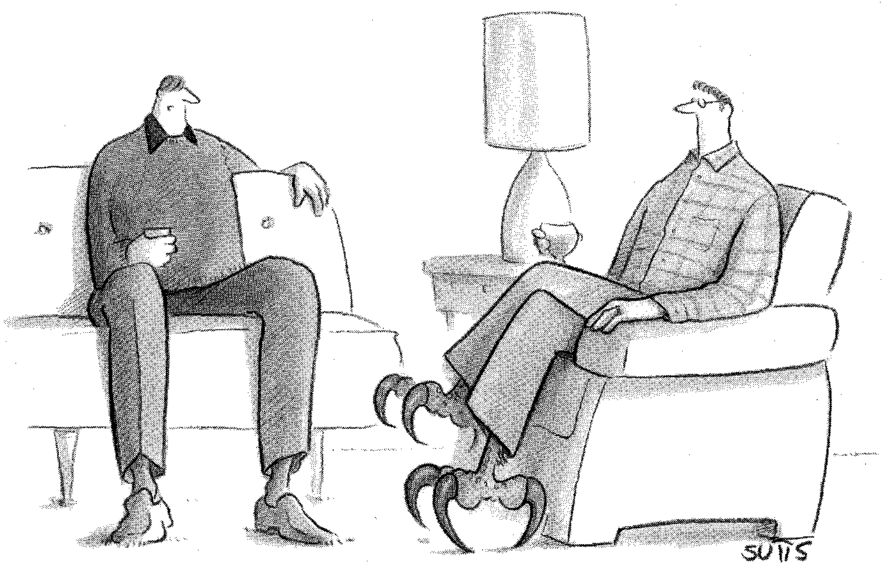
then drank his wages. Sunil's sister, Sunita, was two years younger; when he was small, he'd lost her for a week, but he had been careful not to misplace her after that. He'd shared with her the money he made roaming the airport roads with a sack, retrieving and examining the stuff that other people tossed away. An older boy, odd and constantly blinking, had been his preferred companion, and Sunil even now viewed the dustbins in the cargo area with a proprietary eye, as they had been the boys' most profitable target.

Sunil still did not feel much like a thief. When he took a bath in an abandoned pit at the concrete-mixing plant, he pushed away the algae to inspect his reflection. The change in his profession didn't yet show on his face: same big mouth, wide nose, problem torso. He was too small all over. Even Sunita was taller now, though he bested her in hair. While both of them got bitten by rats, and the rat bites sometimes turned into head boils, she'd recently become a baldie like Anna, because her boils had erupted with worms.

A genial sixteen-year-old neighbor, himself possessed of a worm-bald sister, had walked Sunil through his change in profession. Rather than waiting for stuff to get used up and tossed out a window, a profit-minded individual could get involved earlier in the consumption process. The older boy even offered the use of his bicycle, free, for the first burglary, if Sunil would sell to him what he obtained. "Bring me *jhol*" was what that boy had said: goods procured by indirect means. And so Sunil, once a lawful scavenger, became one of the new economy's micro-saboteurs.

It was 8 P.M., and outside the game parlor the water buffalo were nosing for food through mounds of devalued garbage, excreting the consequences of bad choices in vivid green streams. The owner of the buffalo sold their milk to families in neighborhoods with more disposable income, so Sunil didn't really consider the beasts part of the community. Sunil had two jobs to show for his day, which had started around midnight, when he crept into a four-story airport parking garage that was a month short of completion.

Outside, the building was blue and silver steel. Inside was a series of vast concrete plains. By now, Sunil knew the best way in: past rows of bright-red-and-yellow barricades; past bulldozers and a generator, hooded at night; past a security checkpoint where guards were scouring car trunks with flashlights; past a bitter-almond tree whose leaves had reddened, which meant the nuts had turned sweet; and past two U-shaped bunkers. The bunkers were made of cement bags, piled high, and he'd first seen them in November, after terrorists came by boat from Pakistan to kill a lot of people in another part of the city, a place that also seemed to be crammed with hotels. The gunmen had been on the television at Anna's house, which sat two sheds from the game parlor, and Sunil had seen them through a window.



"Bob tells me you hunt."

The ceilings of the garage were low. All the lights were off, including some blue ones that looked like spiders. During the day, sparrows skittered around the garage, but sparrows didn't skitter at night, so he wasn't sure which animals were making sounds. Not rats, he decided; he had never encountered them here before. Guards he had often encountered, but tonight he couldn't hear where they were. He moved carefully to a stairwell, which, instead of exterior walls, had steel slats with spaces in between them. The slats let in the white light from the newly renovated terminal, where families were still waving to departing passengers. The light increased the risk of his being seen by one of the guards, but it was essential to making an appraisal.

Lately, Sunil had been searching for German silver—a term spoken reverently in Gautam Nagar, and always in English, for some reason. In the slum, it meant aluminum, electroplate, nickel, and an alloy sometimes used to make forks and knives. The price for German silver had recently dropped from a hundred rupees a kilo to sixty, but the price for everything else had fallen further.

Sunil worked his way up the stairwell. On each landing a small hole had been drilled in the concrete, and he supposed that a water pipe would eventually run through it. For now, the hole allowed him to ascertain whether guards were slinking up the stairwell behind him, before he turned to examine each slice of concrete expanse.

Third tier: two strips of aluminum. He darted out to grab them. This wasn't a score that would be fun to recount back at Anna's. The strips were just lying on the floor, and he was surprised that some other thief hadn't already taken them. He thought they might have been parts of a window frame, although the garage didn't have windows. The practical function of items he stole was often a mystery to him. It didn't matter to his work, but he still wondered.

Next, he ascended to the roof, where the only German silver he'd ever found was in a bright-red cabinet marked "Fire Hose Box"—a flimsy holder for a fire extinguisher, worth little. The roof was also the place where he was most likely to encounter watchmen. Nepali watchmen scared him most, because they were sort of Chinese, like Bruce Lee. Still, on every visit he tried to get up there. At four stories, it was the highest roof he'd ever been on. The open space was a rarity in his city of something like sixteen million people.

The roof had two kinds of space, really. One kind was what a boy got when he stood exactly in the middle and knew that even if his arms were ten times longer he'd touch nothing if he spun around. But that kind of space would be gone when the garage was open and filled with cars. The space that would last was the kind he leaned into, over the guardrails. He liked the red-tailed Air India planes flying out, and the municipal water tower with its red and white squares. He liked seeing the glow of the Hyatt sign, and trying to guess which of the dark patches underneath was Gautam Nagar. But what he liked seeing most were the people moving in and out of the terminal. Other boys who visited the roof liked the moving people, too, because they looked small. Sunil had a different perspective. Seeing the moving people from up high made him feel close to them. He felt free to study how they did things in a way he couldn't when he was on the ground. There, if he stared, they would see him staring.

Enough roof: he had to take his German back to Gautam Nagar. Before the terrorist thing, he would have dropped the strips off the roof onto a mound of sand used to make concrete, and then run down to pick them up. He liked the way the sand felt under his bare feet. With the increased security, however, he couldn't risk the clatter of the metal if he missed the sandpile. Instead, he carried his aluminum strips down the stairs, and then, before leaving the building, slid them down his pants, through the legs of his underwear. German against the skin didn't feel good, but whenever he'd tried to carry it outside his underwear it slipped around.

He limped, stiff-legged, past the security checkpoint and the municipal police station, then home for a few hours' sleep in the back of a trash truck. Rising early, he sold the aluminum to Anna, who had a scrap business on top of his other enterprises. Anna opened a purse in the folds of his too short lungi to give Sunil eight rupees: twenty for the silver, minus twelve rupees for three bread-and-potato concoctions called *vada pav* from the fryer. Chinese chicken-chili rice, Sunil's favorite meal, cost twenty-five rupees; he'd had it once several months ago, after an eighty-rupee copper heist—faucet valves from the airport fire brigade. He was still new to his work then and had thought chicken-chili rice might be a regular option.

After lunch, he and a younger friend visited a sewer they called a river, where at midday it was cooler than elsewhere. Then he set out again, to separate tire locks from the wheels of autorickshaws that had ended up on the wrong side of the airport parking police.

One of the area's many tangles of cranes and scaffolding sits two hundred metres from the game parlor, and promises something that prosperous Mumbaikars eagerly await: an elevated expressway to the airport. The current airport road is one of the purgatories where new India collides with old India and makes new India late: roads of missed flights, lost deals in London or Dubai, and dreams dying behind the jam of new cars and incompetent drivers and the fleet of bicycle delivery boys peeling off from the chicken shop, each carrying three hundred eggs. In another year, there would be a smooth ride over this chaos to the international-departures terminal, for those who could afford to fly away.

Sunil's road was as cratered as one in a Vidarbha village. It was after 9 P.M. now, and other thieves were walking down it, lugging goods. The residents who still collected garbage—mostly women, mostly Matang, one of the traditionally untouchable castes—were carrying gunnysacks marked "UPS." Many of the women had started work at five that morning, with short breaks to cook food, wash dishes, shake grit out of sheets, fill water vessels from an oversubscribed tap, and rear their children. The Matangs kept apart from the thieves, but both groups were in a rush to trade what they'd gathered for cash, either from Anna or from one of the two other scrap dealers standing in front of scales nearby.

Twenty-five rupees to a Matang woman in a red sari, forty to her friend, another forty to a thief, who had worked fewer hours. Sunil had secured two tire

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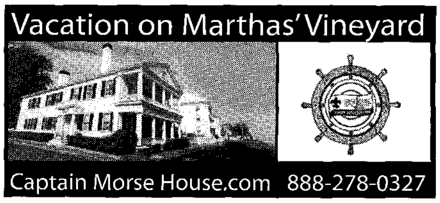

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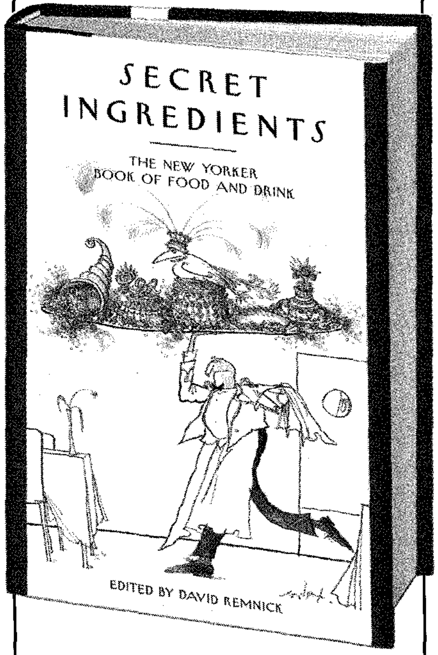

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locks on the second run, but tonight, as on most nights, he was delaying his trade. He had stowed his pieces under the table where Anna cooked. All over the world, according to Anna's newspapers, businesses possessing large quantities of metal were also forestalling their reckonings—"holding a long position" was the term—in the hope that the recession would end, governments and businesses would start building things again, and the price of scrap would rally. Prices never rallied over a few evening hours at Anna's, so Sunil wasn't sure why he liked to procrastinate before setting his goods on the scale.

There were lots of things he did without really knowing the reason. He thought it would be useful to have someone to help him make his arguments—which of the Hindu saints and gods was the best, for instance. This was something about which other kids had strong feelings:

"Your fat Ganpati can't move fast enough to save you from me now, asshole!"

"Ha! My Shiv will open his third eye and destroy you!"

Sunil was too unsure of the respective merits of the various gods to decide upon a favorite. Still, from what he had observed in Gautam Nagar, the fact that a boy knew about the gods didn't mean that the gods would look after the boy.

A new shift of players entered Anna's shed: cashed-out workers, mostly thieves, unwinding before sleep. The Matang women never sat down to play, Sunil had noticed. He sat behind the gamers on a black plastic jug, watching his tire locks while stretching his legs, which were stiff and mapped with cuts from German silver. The next time he had fifteen rupees to spend on nonessentials, he wanted to get his ear pierced. He didn't want one of the rusty bullet casings the older boys wore. He wanted something shiny. He had his eye on a silver-colored skull on offer from a vender at the local train station. He would be able to buy it this weekend if he executed a certain burglary he'd been postponing. This act of procrastination wasn't a mystery to him. He was scared.

When Sunil told new boys he met at the parlor, "I work at the airport daily," "daily" was the word he emphasized. It was 9:30 P.M. now, and his father, who worked only occasionally, had just reeled past the shop. Sunil went outside but didn't call to him. One of his friends, also a thief, was lounging on a bag of Matang garbage. The boy was tripping sloppy on Erase-X, the Indian equivalent of Wite-Out, which office people tended to toss prematurely. Mix the dried bits with three drops of water, put a gob on a rag, stuff the rag into your nostrils, and you had a cheap high more exhilarating than that of the heroin for sale in one of Gautam Nagar's bigger huts. Sunil had tried Erase-X once. Afterward, he couldn't remember much, not even the feeling of being high, which was a disappointment.

The hour of Erase-X was also the hour for reviewing the day's events, and the talk now was of a Tamil woman whose husband had sold the family hut in the course of a four-day binge. While Sunil was prying tire locks from the wheels of autorickshaws, the woman had tried to hang herself from a ceiling fan. Someone cut her down. She was fine. This was dull gossip for a day at Gautam Nagar, and the boys didn't dwell on it. Instead, they returned to Anna's, compared the goods found that day, and gauged which boy had displayed the most daring.

A lot of boys lied about what they stole. Sunil understood the impulse. School, not stealing, was what he lied about. He lied about school all the time.

"Which class are you?" asked a boy he didn't know. New boys were always turning up at Anna's—fresh arrivals from poor states in the north.

"Class five," Sunil replied.

A boy wearing the blue pin-striped uniform issued by the government school turned away from his joystick, confused: "But how can you be in five when I am in five?"

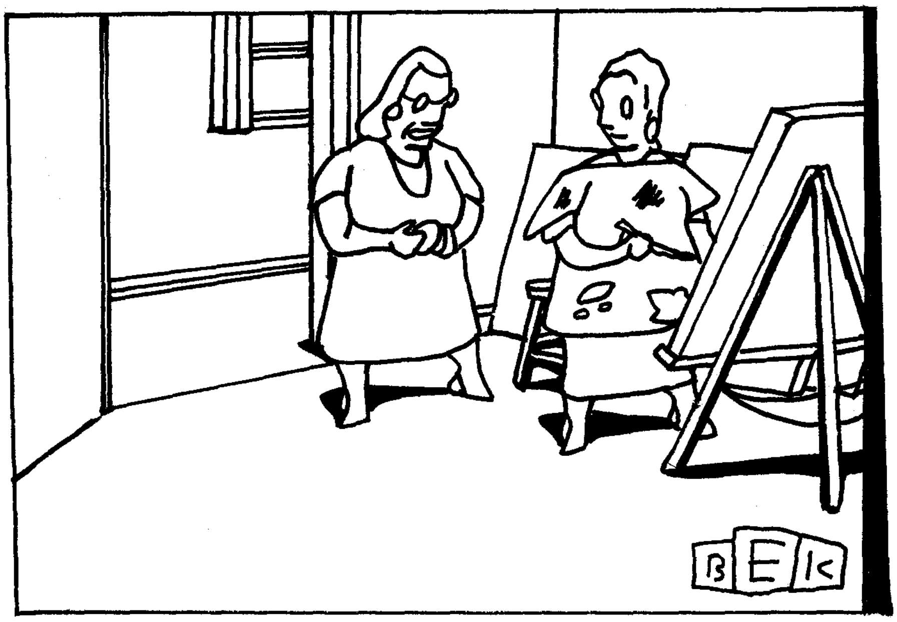
"No, not the school near here. A school in Chakala. Well, right now I don't go to class, but I will go later. I will go only to take the big exams at the end of the year . . ."

At the start of the school year, last July, Sunil had registered for classes at the local government school, as did most boys and girls in the slum. The central and state governments were expanding access to education, though teaching positions at the schools were still doled out locally as political rewards, often to the grossly unqualified. That first week, Sunil and the other children had staggered home with central-government incentives: book bags, umbrellas for the monsoon, pencil boxes. Many students then went back to work, after selling the school supplies to Anna. They needed rupees more than pencil boxes.

In Gautam Nagar, there was a single boy who could reasonably pass as a scholar. His name was Prakash, and though he didn't talk to many people, people talked about him. He'd attended a private English-language high school, then earned a bachelor's degree, and was now cramming for a board exam that might secure him a scholarship to management school. "He went from zero to hero"—that was the line in the Hindi films about slum boys who triumphed, and Prakash went after scholarships by telling his story in this Hindi-film way. But Prakash's father had gone to college, too, had studied science, before being injured in one of the train accidents that kill, on average, four thousand Mumbaikars a year. The father, now a curbside samosa vender, had just hobbled past Anna's on his remaining foot. It had been a poor selling day—"Economic slowdown," he had explained—but he wasn't the sort to treat anxiety with a plastic bag of slum-brewed liquor on his way home. Compared with other management-school aspirants, Prakash was wildly disadvantaged. Relative to other boys in Gautam Nagar, he was privileged.

Sunil had been privileged, too. After his mother died, the Handmaids of the Blessed Trinity, a Catholic charity funded by international donors, had taken him and his sister to a private school for poor and orphaned children outside the city. He remembered a geography book with pull-out maps, and Sister Paulette's promise: "She would put us through class ten and make us big, so that we can get married." This sequence remained his private code: the steps required for a decent adult life. But after a while he and Sunita had been returned to Gautam Nagar. He had played too much, he thought, or studied too little. Now he called the nun Sister Paulette-Toilet, quietly, when her chauffeured van came through the airport slums. He figured she was scouting for children more promising than he.

Zubbu, the daughter of a man who ran the local brothel, was also being scouted by outsiders. She stopped to wave to Sunil on her way home from Koran class: another baldie, but pretty. Instead of going to school, she kept house and cared for her younger brother, who was ugly and liked to make lizards smoke cigarettes before setting them on fire and breaking their skulls with a stone. Zubbu's parents favored the brother, however. He looked just like his father, while Zubbu was conceived during one of her father's prison stints. All month, Zubbu's parents had been trying to sell her, and Sunil would miss seeing her around. He had found her nicer, though, when she had long hair.



"I'm serious—you could really pursue this as an embarrassing hobby."

• •

By 10 P.M., the beautified people were arriving at a white-lit multiplex in the center of the city for the Indian première of "Slumdog Millionaire"—an event coinciding with the early-morning announcement of the Oscar nominations in Los Angeles. Sunil happened to know this part of Mumbai, as it contained the cat-infested t.b. sanatorium where his mother and neighbors had been treated before they died.

In India, "Slumdog Millionaire," a British film whose credits included Bollywood stars, would not be universally admired. In Bihar, slumdwellers greeted the opening by threatening to burn fifty-six effigies of the director, whose movie title equated human beings with dogs. A media-mad politician in a neighborhood close to, but nicer than, Gautam Nagar pressed the dog point with a lawsuit, hoping to force the filmmakers to change the name. He thought "Slum Dash Millionaire" would be more polite. Many educated, successful Indians disliked the film, too, but not because it slighted the poor. Rather, they thought it slighted the increasing affluence and prominence of their country.

The West did seem to make a fetish of the Indian poor, even as the official poverty rate was falling: from thirty-six to twenty-seven per cent in a decade. Sunburned tourists ventured forth from five-star hotels to take eight-hundred-rupee, four-hour slum tours. Madonna took a slum tour, too, though hers was free. In every room of Mumbai's new Four Seasons Hotel, housekeepers placed a copy of "Shantaram," a romantic novel set in the city slums, in a bedside drawer, in lieu of a Bible. Perhaps this Western fascination had something to do with sheer numbers:

India still harbors a third of the world's poor. But Western status anxiety could not be ruled out entirely. While the great powers struggled, India, only sixty years free of colonization, continued to boom, with sufficient entrepreneurial energy and human potential to threaten the traditional global order.

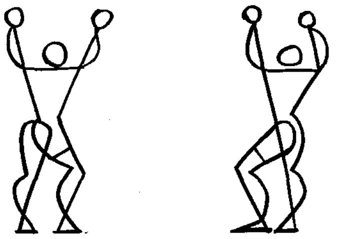
Still, it wasn't just national pride that made prosperous Indians skeptical of "Slumdog." The film's squalid images didn't comport with the India they frequented. While official statistics told a story, true or not, about the dimensions of Indian poverty, it was getting harder than ever for the rich to gauge the particulars. Across the country, electrified fences, walls jagged with broken glass, security gates had gone up as inequality grew. This frenzy of fence-building was not just an Indian thing. It was as global as the crisis in garbage. And it reflected uneasiness about a time that might or might not come in which information flowed so freely that, however little the rich wished to consider the details of the poor, the poor might fully consider the details of the rich. Not the fantasy contours of wealth long available on the television and on the billboards but the precise thing happening next door. The fences insured against a time when a scavenger in Gautam Nagar might learn that a shot of rare Scotch consumed in ten minutes at the Sheraton's ITC Maratha cost exactly as much as he earned in seven hundred fourteen-hour days picking up aluminum cans and used tampon applicators, and find that information too much to bear.

The marvel was that the city didn't already look like a real-life version of the mad, insurrectionist Metal Slug 3, given that the poor far outnumbered the rich. This was the marvel of many great twenty-first-century cities, including New York and Washington, whose levels of inequality now match those of Abidjan and Nairobi. Maybe they *should* have looked like Metal Slug 3. Instead, ingenious social constructions—democracy, charity, subtle and blatant articulations of caste, hope, electrified fences—were keeping things more or less in order. Boys like Sunil had their part to play, too.

As the local newspapers gorged on "Slumdog," a fresh statistic appeared on the inside pages: Mumbai had more reported burglaries than any other metropolitan area in the country, with the greatest concentration in Sunil's area, the western suburbs. Perhaps these thefts were one of the city's secret safety valves: small leaks that kept the whole contraption from exploding. To the private corporation now running the airport, or to the government running the country, the total value of the loss wasn't just a rounding error. It was a bargain. The occasional bit of German silver kept the boys of Gautam Nagar in *vada pav*. It kept one of the world's great, unjust cities in relative peace.

The prospective theft that unnerved Sunil was at a place he called the Taj, but his Taj was not the luxury hotel that suffered casualties in the November terrorist attack. His Taj was a plain low-rise building, partly owned by the famous hotel company, on the airport grounds. Behind high stone walls and concertina wire, the company made meals to be served on flights. Shortly before the terrorists came, Sunil had seen orange scaffolding rising up inside the compound—a sign of construction and of metal on the ground. A few weeks later, he and three friends began to explore the possibilities. Though the concertina wire was impossible to clear, they found a hole behind some brush at the base of one of the walls. The wall edged a gravel lane that was pitch-black at night, and the other boys tripped on stones when darting down it. Sunil rarely stumbled, as he'd been using the lane for years. At its end was the sewer he called a river. When he was little, the water had seemed to him like swimming-pool water. Now it reeked, and he was puzzled that the fish still tasted sweet.

All month, from the sewer-bank place, he'd been staring at the brush that hid the hole, and not deciding anything much. Because he ran so much faster than most policemen, and climbed well, he'd been held at the station only four times. Those times were bad enough. They would be worse now, because of the terrorists. Everything was worse: new dogs, new contingents of guards, new guns. But the other boys didn't seem to register the difference in climate. They just looked at him expectantly. He had somehow become the boy who had to say, "Go in, get that."



A boy named Deepak had been his go-in-get-that person. Deepak's decisions could be poor because of Erase-X, but he was four years older than Sunil and genuinely daring. Then he died of German-silver fever. Security guards in one of the compounds had gouged out his eyes, put a sickle in his asshole. Sunil didn't like to think about what had happened to Deepak after they put the sickle in: how they ripped a cut, like a smile. The children of Gautam Nagar saw his body after it was tossed back over the wall. The police had no record of the murder.

At the game parlor, no one mentioned Deepak after dark. Invoking the name of any dead person after sunset increased the likelihood that his ghost would come back and haunt you. That was one thing about which everyone in Gautam Nagar—Hindu, Muslim, from the north, from the south—agreed.

Sunil stood up: it was cash-in time. Abdul, a twenty-year-old Muslim scrap dealer, was standing with a friend just outside Anna's. Sunil used to sell his soda cans to Abdul, before he learned from other Hindus about the invisible magnets Muslims put on their scales. Abdul looked funny now, twisting his neck back and forth just like the horses across the road that had been painted to look like zebras. He and they were probably flinging back and forth the same malarial mosquitoes.

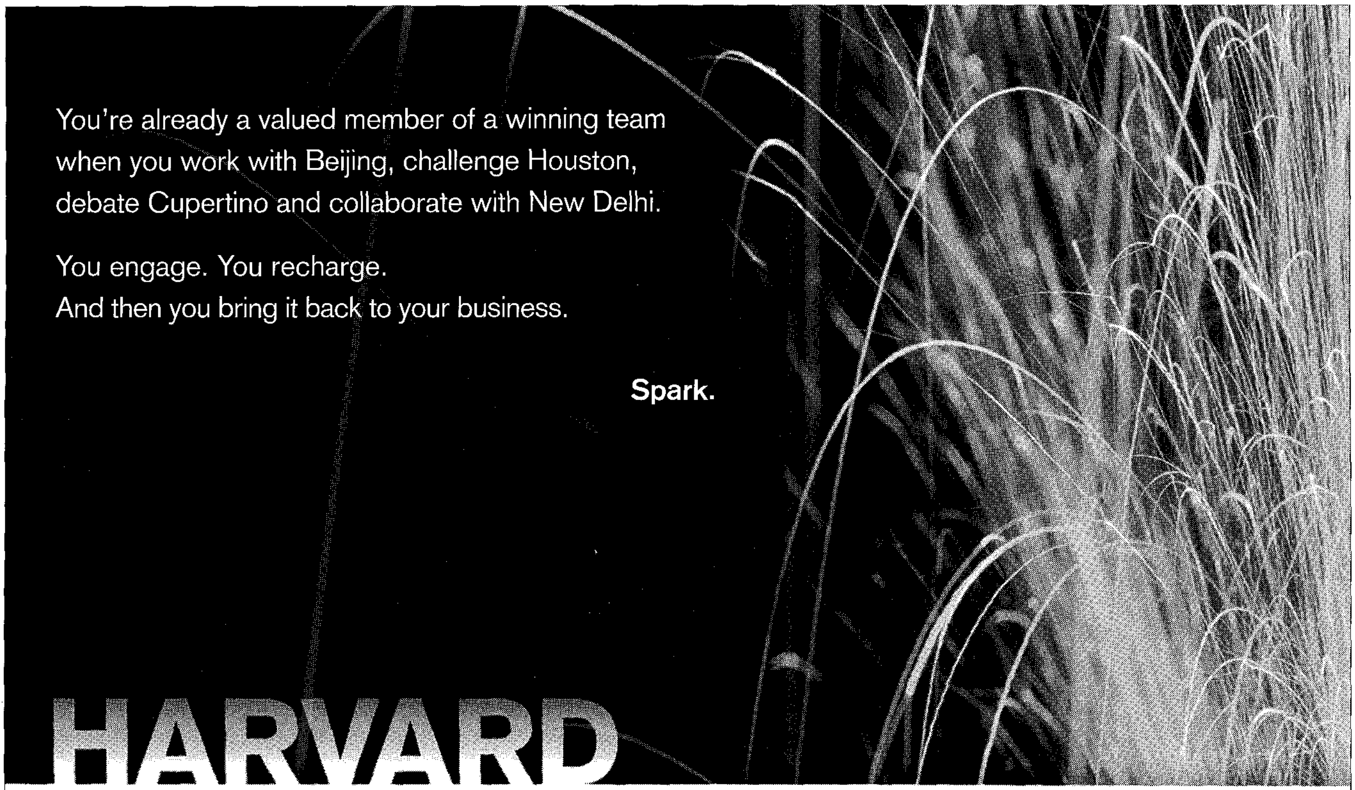
"Do you ever think when you look at someone, when you listen to someone, does that person really have a life?" Abdul asked his friend, who had been practicing his English by studying an advertisement for mango-flavored candies. Sunil liked to listen to Abdul, despite the invisible magnets. "Like that woman who just went to hang herself, or her husband, who probably beat her before she did this?" Abdul said. "I wonder what kind of life is that—I go through tensions just to see the kind of life they're living. But it is a life. Even the person who lives like a dog still has a kind of life. Once my mother was beating me for something, and that idea just came to me. I said, 'If what is happening now—you beating me—is to keep happening for the rest of my life, it would be a bad life, but it would be a life, too.' And my mother was so shocked when I said that. She said, 'Don't confuse yourself by thinking about such terrible lives.'"

Abdul's friend bolted, leaving the candy advertisement in Abdul's care, and Sunil wandered in the opposite direction. It was nearly 10:30 P.M. Anna was inside his house, playing with his two young grandchildren while watching the climax of a Tamil soap opera. Sunil decided to watch, too, through the window, not turning even when the Tamil woman who had just tried to hang herself passed so close she nearly touched him, crying. Sunil didn't speak Tamil, but he had seen enough of the soap opera to know that the pretty woman on the screen, also crying, had three sisters and one brother she didn't know about. The soap-opera woman was now in a courtroom, her testimony about to convict the brother she didn't know for a grave crime involving a computer disk—roll credits. To be continued. Now Anna was free to preside over the scale.

Sunil knew nothing of the movie that ends with an airport-slum boy finding money, love, and fame. However, he might have recognized one of that movie's conceits: that deprivation may give a child a certain intelligence. The other conceit—that a child's specific miserable experiences might be the things to spring him from his deprivation—was the lie. It was the movie version of the electrified fence. The women who had been manicured and exfoliated and blown out would linger at the première past 1 A.M., then head to the after party at the JW Marriott. They could relax, not just because the film about the slum boy had a happy ending but because the boy's suffering had been part of the solution.

Sunil trusted Anna more than he trusted other people. But after unloading his goods onto one side of the scale he picked up each of the five-kilo black weights Anna used and held them for a moment, to verify their substance. When satisfied, he laid the weights gently in the other cradle and watched as the needle registered its verdict: fifty rupees. Fifty plus the twenty he'd made earlier. Over the poverty line, for this one day.

Sunil could buy the soap he needed for a bath in the pit, but not the earring with the skull, which he had hoped would make him feel older. But he would get it after the Taj. When he got to his hut, he discovered that his father was still wandering and had taken the only candle. This made him feel younger. At home, unlike at the airport, he was still afraid of the dark. ♦



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BY YONI BRENNER

On a rainy night in 1793, the Van Buren family ox slipped in the mud, fracturing its foreleg. Realizing that the ox was no longer any good to anyone, Abe Van Buren loaded his flintlock and took aim, when, all of a sudden, his ten-year-old son, Martin, leaped in front of the ox and cried, "If you shoot this ox, Father, you would do as well to shoot me! For this unfortunate beast is no less God's creation than I." And so his father shot him. Then he turned to Martin's identical twin and said, "From now on, you're Martin." And that is how Phil Van Buren became President of the United States.

James Monroe, too, had a cherry tree. It may not have been as tall or as sturdy as George Washington's, and its fruit may not have been as abundant. In fact, it may not have been a tree at all but a big wooden picket with clumps of rotting cherries stapled to it. Still, it was the finest tree in the Monroe orchard, and rare was the afternoon that James's father did not spend three or four hours buffing its knobby bark, tutoring it in Latin and rhetoric, whispering sweet nothings into its low-lying branches. "You could learn a lot from that cherry tree," he was fond of telling people. "You really could."

Then, one day, James took his father's prized axe from the mantelpiece and reduced the tree to a sorry pile of mulch. But his father was not angry. "Think nothing of it, son, for a tree is just a tree," he said, his hand resting gently on the boy's shoulder. "But touch my axe again and I'll break your fucking arm."

"Pirates!" the young sailor Andrew Jackson cried. He and MacGraw skittered down the mainmast and in a heartbeat a hundred and twenty men, all sweat and sinew, swarmed the deck, priming the cannons, affixing bayonets to rifles. In two minutes, they were ready.

The captain probed the misty horizon, his lips contracting into a taut frown. "What pirates?" he shouted. "These are otters! Who is responsible?" His fearsome eyes searched the crew, and came to rest squarely on Andrew Jackson. But Andrew Jackson did not shrink. No, he boldly returned the captain's gaze, and, with a single bony thumb, he gestured over his right shoulder—in the direction of MacGraw.

It wasn't often that President Eisenhower lingered on the ground floor of the White House. But something on that sticky summer evening had summoned him downstairs, to the unfamiliar corners of the Vermeil Room, where he stood transfixed before the alabaster temptress with the narrow black eyes. True, it was only a painting, but the hero of D Day was besotted nonetheless, lost in the glossy visage of Dolley Madison.

His visits continued through the summer. Some nights, he brought her flowers; some nights, scented soap. Some nights, he would arrive with a tin of caviar and two quarts of imported varnish. The President would slip out just before dawn, whereupon the maids would find that the adjacent portraits—Florence Harding, Edith Roosevelt, the estimable Mrs. Wilson—had been rehung backward, their reproachful eyes watching nothing but the wall.

Finally, he resolved to tell Mamie his secret. "I'm in love," he said, standing at the door of the executive bedroom. "It's a rotten thing, and I'm sorry, but there's *nothing to be done*. I hope you'll forgive me." With that, the President gave a curt nod, pivoted on his heel, and shut the door behind him.

Mamie Eisenhower relaxed her grip on the comforter, and suddenly the head of a compact, gray-haired man popped out from beneath the sheets.

"You think he's onto us?" said Herbert Hoover.

"Hell if I know," Mamie replied. "The man is a lunatic."

"Retreat!" cried Durutte, his voice straining above the crackling musket fire and the deadly whine of grapeshot.

At Napoleon's headquarters, on the outskirts of Waterloo, the news had just arrived. "Impossible!" Napoleon cried. "Who is responsible for this debacle?" At once, the crowd of assembled officers parted and Napoleon found himself face to face with Andrew Jackson. But Andrew Jackson did not back down. No, he returned the Emperor's stare, and, with a single bony thumb, he gestured over his shoulder—in the direction of MacGraw.

The first two wishes had been easy. Sure, President seemed like a reach, but George W. Bush figured you only came across a genie in a lamp so many times—you might as well go for it. As for the chocolate milkshake, well, that was a lark. Later, he would claim that he was just testing the genie's powers, but in truth he'd really wanted that milkshake, and in his heart he never regretted it. The third wish, though, had proved more vexing than he'd ever imagined; and, to his own surprise, the genie's suggestion was starting to make sense. "Explain it to me one more time," W. said.

"You see, master," the genie said, stroking his goatee, "high earners provide the capital for business infrastructure and equity markets. Therefore, sweeping tax cuts for corporate income, coupled with steady deregulation, will stimulate growth, the benefits of which will necessarily trickle down."

Years later, with the country in a shambles, the President privately wondered if he'd been too quick to accept the genie's supply-side logic. But by then the genie had his own problems: his 401(k) was all but defunct, and he found himself embroiled in a major lawsuit over whether or not he had assured a previous client that "all the riches of Araby" were tax-exempt. ♦

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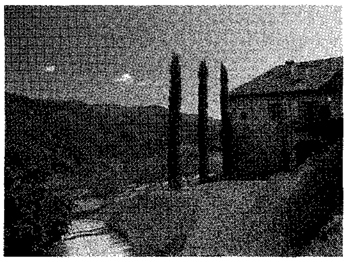

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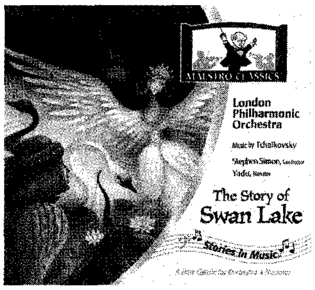

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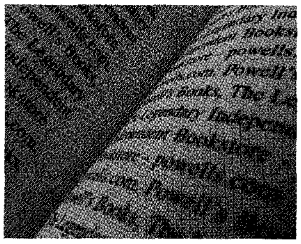

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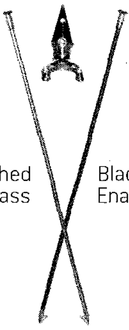

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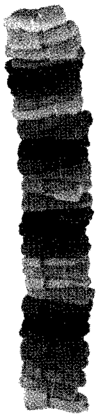

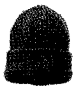

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ANNALS OF TECHNOLOGY

SHOOT!

An Appalachian gunsmith's robot army.

BY EVAN RATLIFF

At the age of seventy-four, Jerry Baber has winnowed his primary interests in life to four subjects: shotguns, robots, women, and cars. When Baber is holding forth—his default mode of communication being the filibuster—his conversation tends to fall somewhere among these categories. Often his passions intersect, as in the question of whether or not a Corvette is an ideal car for picking up women. (It is.) Similarly, Baber might be discussing his love of robots and shotguns, and whether, by combining the two, he is helping to shape the future of warfare from his garage. (He is.)

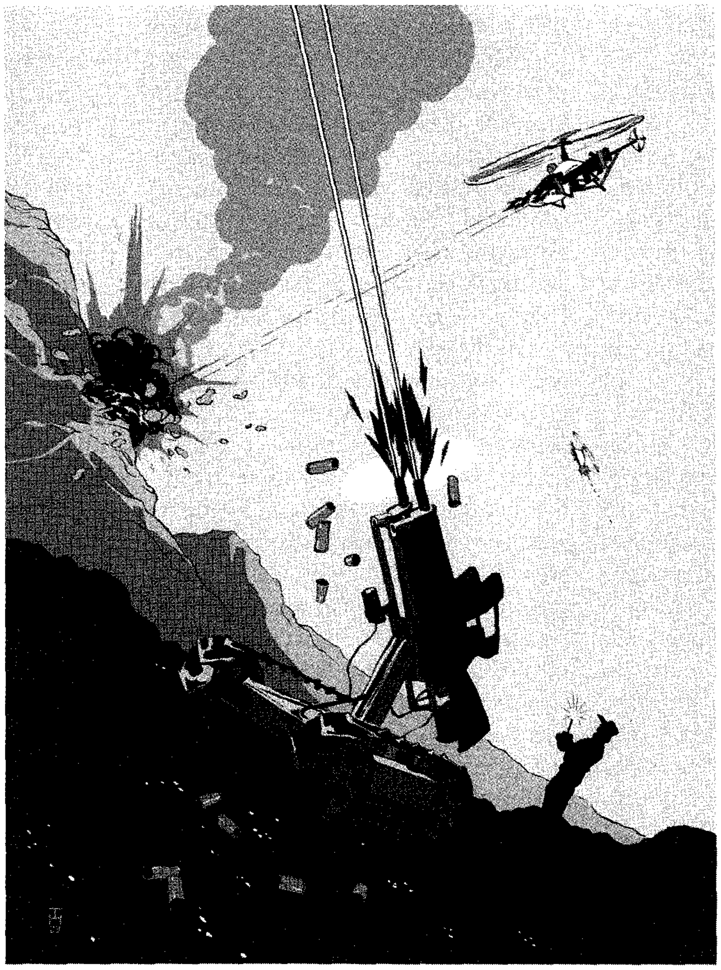
Baber, an engineer by training, is an expert in investment casting—a method for making small pieces of finely shaped metal. He lives down the road from the Bristol Motor Speedway, in Piney Flats, Tennessee, a hilly town dotted with cattle farms, just south of the Virginia border. There he operates a small foundry, where he manufactures gun parts. Over the years, he has contributed triggers, barrels, hammers, and other components for half a million firearms. "I probably know as much, or more, as any one single person about manufacturing guns," he told me one afternoon, while driving through the Appalachian foothills in his cherry-red Chevy Impala. ("The best buy on the road today, barring none.")

Until recently, Baber's reputation as a firearms craftsman was known only to a few dozen gun-trade insiders. Then, a few years ago, he started producing, from start to finish, his own weapon: a fully automatic shotgun called the AA-12. The AA-12 has the power of a twelve-gauge shotgun but none of its bruising recoil. Recoil is a problem with any shotgun; a typical single-shot twelve-gauge will, as Baber puts it, "just rattle your damn teeth when it goes off." A gun's kick occurs when gas from ignited gunpowder propels the shell out of a gun barrel, creating an equal and opposite force that pushes the gun's firing bolt backward. That force eventually gets transferred to the shooter's shoulder, and the pop of the recoil also sends the barrel upward. Trying to fire an automatic version of a twelve-gauge shotgun would be like holding a fire hose with one hand.

By contrast, you can fire an AA-12—which shoots five shotgun shells per second—with one hand and hold a mug of coffee in the other without spilling it. Made almost entirely of aircraft-grade stainless steel, the gun can fire thousands of rounds without cleaning. Baber spent a dozen years, and upward of a million and a half dollars of his own money, perfecting the gun. He believes that the AA-12 is the most deadly close-range weapon ever created.

Not long ago, Baber decided that his gun was so reliable and accurate that it could be mounted with confidence on unmanned vehicles. Armed robots, he believes, could offer crucial assistance in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan; they could be employed on a street monitored by snipers or sent into a building harboring insurgents. Last year, Baber met with engineers at Robotex—a start-up in California that makes ground-based robots—and at Neural Robotics, a company outside Nashville that manufactures unmanned helicopters. Together, they created prototypes of small, remote-controlled armed machines. Baber keeps several in his workshop, and talks about them as if they were pets.

Like most people who travel to Piney Flats to meet Baber, I had first learned about him through online video clips illustrating the destructive potential of his creations. The most popular videos involve Baber and others shooting the AA-12 at targets in Baber's back yard. In one clip—viewed two million times on YouTube—a dainty, short-haired woman in high heels casually grips the gun and fires off eight hundred balls of .20-calibre metal in four seconds, before turning to smile at the camera. In another, Baber uses a remote control to maneuver a ground robot around a room. The video cuts to a tiny white helicopter, whose cockpit could barely accommodate a toddler, at rest on the grass. The blades whir, and the aircraft rises in a strong wind; suddenly, it unloads twin AA-12s into a distant wooden target.



One military expert calls weaponized robots "the future of warfare."

TOMER HANUKA

Baber keeps several workshops in Piney Flats, on a wide, grassy piece of property straddling a hilltop road. His foundry occupies the back of an eleven-thousand-square-foot single-story warehouse with a pine-log exterior. A lifelong bachelor, he lives in an apartment at the front of the building; in the middle of the complex is a large indoor pool.

Baber has an elliptical paunch, a white walrus mustache, and long sideburns that, along with the red-tinted glasses he sometimes wears, suggest a seventies country-music singer. He likes his jeans loose enough to require an occasional hitch, and denim button-downs with the pocket flaps splayed open. His voice has a friendly, nasal twang that renders "where" as "whur."

When I visited, a seven-foot-long white helicopter, like the one in the video, sat on a folding table; Baber introduced it as Junior. He didn't have names for two robots that were on the floor. The larger of them, the size of a Radio Flyer wagon, had caterpillar treads, like a miniature tank. An AA-12, whose cylindrical magazine gave it the look of the tommy guns favored by Prohibition-era gangsters, had been affixed to a small turret. The smaller robot had wheels, and its turret gripped a semi-automatic version of an M-16 rifle, which Baber had re-engineered so that it, too, fired without recoil.

We sat in a pair of office chairs, and Baber grabbed a radio-signal remote control. He switched on the larger robot, directing it across the concrete floor until the treads bumped against my foot. On an LCD display behind Baber, I could see an image of my leg, transmitted by a camera under the robot's gun barrel. The gun then pointed at my stomach. He assured me that it was not loaded.

We were interrupted by the arrival of Cory Olson, a salesman from Alabama who, like me, had come to see the robots and guns at first hand. A retired Army officer, Olson works for Pelican, which manufactures the high-impact plastic cases Baber uses to store his robots. Pelican's board of directors is chaired by General (Ret.) Peter Pace, a former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Baber was hoping to lure Pace out to Piney Flats to see the robots, and he launched into a rapid-fire soliloquy about the capabilities of his "family." The AA-12, unlike most military weapons, could shoot a variety of ammunition, including nonlethal pellets ("You can just machine-gun a whole crowd with it, if you want to," he said reflectively) and a specially designed mini-grenade. He'd tested the mini-grenade by shooting it into a car windshield: "They blow out both side windows, take the rear window out, and just shred the car." The ground robots' treads enabled them to climb stairs, and a remote operator could use a zoom lens on the robots' cameras to hold a target at several hundred yards. Such robots could, for example, roll out and defend a soldier wounded in a firefight. A larger ground robot, meanwhile, could be outfitted to carry six smaller ones—"so when it blasts its way in, now you've got seven robots in that building."

Providing air support for this "fighting team," Baber continued, would be Junior—known more formally as an AutoCopter. It could fly sixty miles an hour, at up to fifteen thousand feet, and could navigate a preprogrammed course without human intervention. It could drop mortar rounds or fire directly at targets on the ground, and could carry up to fifty pounds of cargo—enough to deposit smaller robots behind enemy lines. "Al Qaeda and the Taliban can't fight directly against our military," Baber concluded. "This takes away their ability to hide."

To demonstrate, he opened the workshop door and guided the larger robot onto a concrete porch. As we followed it outside, he spun the turret around to face a grassy slope marred by a wide dirt scar, where Baber and his visitors have fired thirty-five thousand rounds of ammunition into the ground.

"Let's get our ears out of the way," he said, and we walked to the far end of the porch. As we looked over his shoulder, Baber hit a red button on the remote control, firing a single shell into the hillside. The report echoed across the surrounding farmland. "Now I'm gonna let you push that button and hold it," he said, handing the remote to Olson, who depressed the button; the gun rattled off ten shots in two seconds. A furious spray of pellets raised an orangey dirt cloud. The turret shuddered slightly, but the robot remained rooted in position. "That's powerful," Olson said, his eyes wide.

Baber took the remote back and began driving the robot around the yard. "You've been to Iraq. What if they had these over there?" he asked Olson.

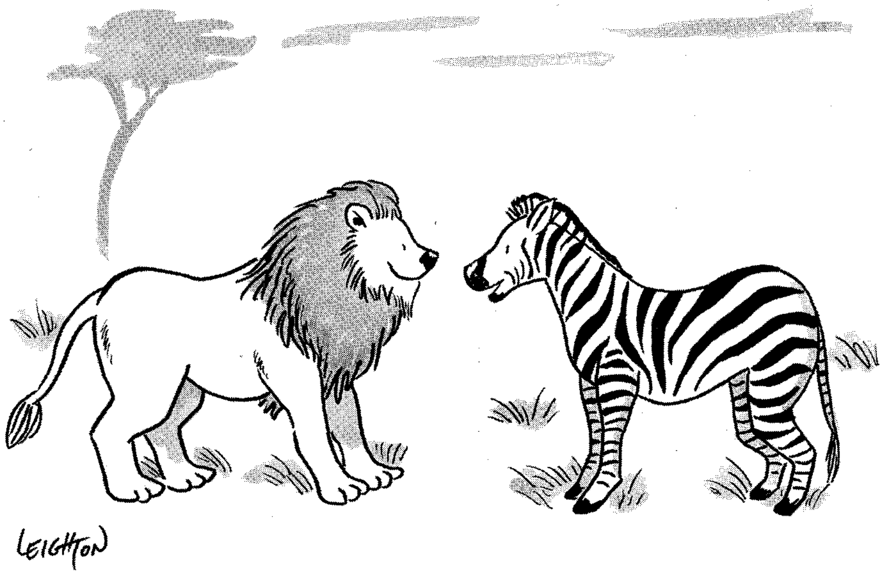
"It would enhance our capabilities, without a doubt."

"It'd be staggering," Baber said. The porch was littered with shell casings, and we gathered them up and put them into a trash can already full of them. Driving the robot back inside, Baber said, "If I never sell the first one, I'll be here until I'm a hundred years old, sitting around playing with 'em."

Baber's back yard is nearly four hundred miles from the Beltway corridors where defense contractors market their wares to Congress and the Pentagon. But his vision of a legion of small armed robots has found some surprising champions. John Arquilla, a professor of defense analysis at the Naval Postgraduate School, in Monterey, California, specializes in networked warfare, and has written a number of influential books on the topic. After seeing Arquilla speak about battlefield technology on the History Channel, Baber called him up to tell him about "the family." Arquilla was excited enough by Baber's products to dispatch two graduate students to write theses—now classified—on the AA-12 and the armed AutoCopter. He has also urged colleagues in the Pentagon to consider buying the devices. Baber, he told me, has "given a huge amount of firepower to small platforms." He added, "We are talking about the possibility of taking our soldiers out of harm's way, using tele-operated systems. Whether Jerry Baber makes the breakthrough or it's someone else, this, to a great extent, is the future of warfare."

Remote-controlled weaponry is already used by the Pentagon and the C.I.A. In 2002, the Air Force began deploying Predator drones armed with Hellfire missiles, which are operated by human pilots based in the Nevada desert. These and other unmanned aerial vehicles—or U.A.V.s—have been deployed widely in Afghanistan and Iraq. President Obama, during his first week in office, ordered continued Predator strikes in northwest Pakistan, where attacks have targeted Al Qaeda and other militants, sparking Pakistani anger over civilian casualties.

On the ground, combat robots have been slower to emerge. Small unmanned ground vehicles, known as U.G.V.s, have been used to defeat improvised explosive devices in Iraq and Afghanistan; the robots have mechanical arms, and some are equipped with demolition explosives. Just after 9/11, the Pentagon helped fund a project to add a weapon to a robot. The resulting machines—called SWORDS, a tortured acronym for Special Weapons Observation Reconnaissance Direct-action System—are essentially search-and-rescue robots with an M-240 or an M-249 machine gun attached. Like Baber's devices, the guns can be fired by a remote operator.



"I give up. What's black and white and red all over?"

The U.S. military, however, has approached the subject of armed ground robots with considerable wariness. Ellen Purdy, the director of the Pentagon's Joint Ground Robotics Enterprise, which was established to examine how to develop robots and integrate them into battle situations, told me, "Technology always outpaces doctrine. Basically, we now have a lot of technology but we really don't know the best way to employ it."

Concern over arming robots was heightened in 2006, after an incident that occurred when an early version of the SWORDS was being demonstrated at a military show in Albuquerque. After successful tests on the morning of the demonstration, the robot sat in the sun for several hours before observers gathered in a makeshift grandstand. When the operator turned the robot on, a fried wire caused it to spin in place. The assembled crowd ducked and sprinted for cover. Bob Quinn, a vice-president in charge of the project at Foster-Miller, the company that made the robot, says that there was no danger of the gun firing—it had automatically shut off—and that the company fixed the problem and tripled its safety redundancies before the robots were deployed. Even so, skeptics tell the Albuquerque story as an illustration of the possibility of armed robots running amok on the battlefield.

Combat-robot advocates are quick to say that the decision to fire will always remain in the hands of a human operator. Their refrain is "Man in the loop." Yet several weapons systems, including the Patriot missile and some defense systems built for U.S. Navy ships, can be programmed to shoot without a human pulling the trigger. P. W. Singer, a fellow at the Brookings Institution and the author of "Wired for War," about the growth of robotic warfare, says, "We've already redefined what 'in the loop' means. It's moved from making the decision to fire to mere veto power. The lines are already fuzzy, and they're disappearing."

The Army deployed three SWORDS to Iraq in mid-2007. According to Quinn, commanders have decreed that the robots must be kept immobile—surrounded by sandbags—if they are to fire their guns. In Quinn's view, that defeats the purpose of deploying a remote-controlled weapon. "Unmanned air vehicles have taken twenty years to gain real acceptance," he says.

"The kids who are fighting and dying—those guys get it. The further removed you are from the front the more questions you have about 'Are we ready?' " Baber, for his part, seems baffled by the military's worries about deploying armed robots; as he put it, his are "ready to go out and raise hell right now."

One result of the Pentagon's hesitancy is that the competition to build armed robotic systems remains wide open. Baber, despite his outsider status, likes his chances, thanks to his success at eliminating recoil, the lightness of his robots, and their low cost of production. Baber's approach, Arquilla says, "is simple, robust, and, in my view, highly effective. In the irregular-warfare situations in which we find ourselves, this is a way to both enhance our presence and minimize the risk to our own troops."

Virtually no one doubts that robots will eventually occupy a central role in the U.S. military. Future Combat Systems, the Army's one-hundred-and-sixty-billion-dollar modernization effort, calls for a host of unmanned vehicles and combat drones. "It is an unprecedented revolution in military affairs," Singer says. "This changes the 'who' of warfare, at a fundamental level."

One evening, Baber invited me to stop by and watch him make gun parts in his foundry, a soot-stained room in the pine-log compound. Since some of his employees have other jobs, the work typically doesn't get started until four o'clock; Baber takes a nap beforehand. "As you get older, you don't want to run that hard," he said. In the foundry, three employees were preparing to pour steel parts for a .38 revolver manufactured by the Connecticut gunmaker Charter Arms. The basic technique, known as "lost wax" casting, dates back to the beginnings of civilization. Each gun part starts out as a piece of hardened red wax. The wax parts are dipped repeatedly in a ceramic glaze, and then the wax is melted, leaving behind a mold into which to pour steel.

The pouring process involved first melting a bar of steel in a three-thousand-degree magnetically heated pot. When Baber, using a long thermometer, deemed the steel's consistency just right, an employee used tongs to grab a hollow ceramic mold out of a large oven. She passed it to Baber, who held it in tongs of his own. As Baber positioned the mold, two employees tilted the pot, pouring the blazing orange liquid into the mold. When the steel cooled, the ceramic exterior would be cracked off.

Baber's artisanal method allows him to work with rare, high-tolerance alloys that are too strong to be machined into precise shapes after they've hardened. Typical castings for gun parts have an error tolerance of plus or minus five thousandths of an inch. "Jerry will hold plus or minus two thousandths, and sometimes closer," Nick Ecker, the C.E.O. of Charter Arms, told me. "He does incredible things."

Over the years, Baber has made a tidy living on his gun-parts business. In addition to the workshops, his property contains a large, unoccupied Tudor house; he also owns a vacation house on a nearby lake. An amateur pilot, he has a small Cessna, which he keeps at the local airport and occasionally flies. He doesn't like to travel farther than a day's distance from Piney Flats, though. "Money's not really driving me," he said. "I like what I'm doing." Even if he cashed in on the robots, he said, "I wouldn't live real high."

Baber grew up an only child in Covington, Virginia, a paper-mill town two hundred miles northeast of Piney Flats. His father was a maintenance machinist, and his mother ran the local Western Union office. When Baber was ten years old, his father took him hunting with a .22 rifle. "My daddy made me shoot a little squirrel," he says. "That poor little thing was sitting there, looking at me, and just fell over. I didn't hunt after that."

Following high school, Baber earned degrees in electrical and industrial engineering from Virginia Tech. He enlisted in the Army after college; assigned to Fort Knox as a tank mechanic, he never left the base. After moving to Piney Flats, he spent a couple of years working on radar systems for Raytheon before he and a partner found a lucrative niche making precision bomb springs, at the height of the Vietnam War. "Everything that came out of airplanes—timing and detonators—came from us," he recalls. "We built two hundred and eighty-five thousand bomb fuses a month, with four or five springs in each one." As the war wound down, Baber shifted into precision casting, making airplane-engine parts and other items, until the day a man walked into his shop and asked Baber to "tool up" a gun. Baber crafted a few weapon parts, word of his work got around, and before long guns were Baber's main business.

In 1987, a friend named Max Atchisson came up to Piney Flats from Atlanta. Atchisson, a former engineer for Hughes Aircraft, had received more than twenty patents, mostly gun-related. Baber took him to dinner at the local Perkins, and Atchisson showed him the plans for an automatic shotgun that could harness recoil, called the Atchisson Automatic Shotgun. Baber was impressed: in Atchisson's scheme, a specially designed valve on the front of the gun bled off the gas that would otherwise drive the weapon backward. An oversized internal spring absorbed the remaining momentum of the bolt before it reached the back of the gun; the spring then propelled the bolt forward to pick up a new cartridge. In essence, the gun recycled its kickback into the next shot, a property called "constant recoil."

Atchisson had fallen into debt, and persuaded Baber to buy the plans and build a prototype. When Baber did so, he encountered the difficulty of turning a blueprint into a working weapon. "Everything was wrong!" he told me. "The magazines were screwed up, the springs were screwed up—it was just a damn mess. Weren't nothing right in it." Baber still thought Atchisson was among the most brilliant gun inventors in history. But the original design's problems, he said, "could make a preacher cuss."

In order to document the prototype's flaws in minute detail, he spent close to fifty thousand dollars on a high-speed camera and a bullet trap—a red, coffin-size box that allows him to fire weapons in a controlled environment. Using a computer, he analyzed hundreds of hours of video, frame by frame. After some two hundred modifications to Atchisson's original design, Baber finally built a working gun—christened the Auto Assault-12.

"This here is the only stainless-steel military weapon in the world," Baber said. The chemical properties of stainless steel are such that the gun requires no oil or cleaning. "It won't rust if you wash it," he went on. "Get it full of mud, you put a little water in it and slosh it around. I've got one here that's had eleven thousand rounds through it."

By 2004, Baber had produced ten

AA-12s, and, despite the high price tag—between ten and twelve thousand dollars each—the gun was a hit. After articles in *Armed Forces Journal* and *Soldier of Fortune* printed Baber's office phone number, he began receiving upward of a hundred inquiries a day. This created a dilemma, since federal law prohibits Americans from owning fully automatic weapons, unless they have a manufacturer's license (Baber does). Police departments asked for AA-12s, but Baber decided that the gun was too powerful to sell outside the military. He donated one to his local county sheriff, but turned everyone else away. "I don't want that on my conscience—something I created going out and killing people all over the damn place," he said. "I'm not worried about what it does over in Iraq or Afghanistan. That's fine."

The military, however, was less eager than the public to procure the gun. The AA-12 is "almost foolproof," Major General (Ret.) Carroll Childers, a former weapons designer for the Navy and Marine Corps, told me. "It's a great weapon for urban-terrain operations or jungle operations." He continued, "It's got real knockdown power, and it's a scary weapon. People cringe at the sight of a shotgun." But the Army "has this not-invented-here syndrome," he said. "They reject anything that didn't come out of there."

A few years ago, Baber took a pair of AA-12s down to Fort Benning, Georgia, for a demonstration. "The soldiers, twenty-five of them, fired five hundred rounds and loved the gun," he said. "But the people down there that write requirements for a new weapons system, they didn't want nothing to do with it." Loading the guns into his trunk, Baber concluded that there was only one way to convince the government of the gun's usefulness: robots. Robots with AA-12s would be too powerful to ignore.

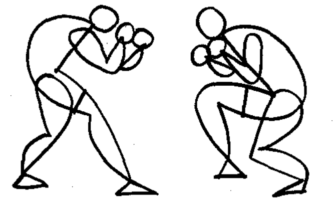
He contacted Foster-Miller; the company was interested but turned him down, citing the AA-12's lack of military approval. Baber approached the defense contractor Northrop Grumman. No sale. He turned to iRobot, a maker of robotic vacuums that also produces robots for the U.S. military. The company liked the recoilless aspect and created a prototype, but then backed off on weaponizing its robots, in order to focus on unarmed systems.

Finally, Baber came across Neural Robotics, the maker of the AutoCopter. Mike Fouché, the company's founder and C.E.O., recalls, "I got a phone call out of the blue from some guy up in Tennessee who said he wanted to put a gun on a helicopter. He came down a few days later. About half a day later, we had the gun mounted on one of our helicopters. A day later, we actually went out and fired it."

In mid-2007, Baber and another business partner, a former editor of *Armed Forces Journal* named John Roos, began showing off the helicopter at military shows. Soon after, Roos heard about two men from Silicon Valley who had been demonstrating a weaponized robot to Blackwater U.S.A., the North Carolina-based security contractor. "If you are looking for something for ground," Roos recalls being told, "these guys are the state of the art."

Last year, I went to Palo Alto, California, to meet Adam and Nathan Gettings, of Robotex, Baber's partner for the ground robots. Adam is a twenty-six-year-old self-taught engineer who designs the machines' hardware. Nathan, thirty-two, is a former developer for PayPal. The founder of Robotex is Terry Izumi, a special-effects technician and an occasional film director in Los Angeles. In the mid-eighties, Izumi worked for the toy company that developed Teddy Ruxpin, the talking bear. For years, he says, he watched the progress of military robotics, "but the technology I was seeing was kind of wanting." Finally, he decided to "get up and do something about it." Izumi drew up some ideas for weaponized robots and called up Nathan Gettings. They signed on a couple of YouTube employees as software engineers and hired Adam to start building robots in his living room.

The Gettingses grew up on a farm in southern Illinois. "I was raised a mechanic," Adam said; as a child, he once attached a weed-whacker engine to a bicycle. "My dad, when machinery would break, would often leave it and move on. So I had this sort of junk yard of old machines I could play with." Three years ago, he recalls, Robotex developed some prototype robots, but clients said that "they needed something smaller and more portable." So the Gettingses switched to developing miniature robots with tank treads.



Arming robots was always part of Robotex's plans, and when Adam saw videos of the AA-12 the recoilless gun seemed like the perfect option for a lightweight robot. When Baber called, they were eager to arrange a pilgrimage to Piney Flats. "We didn't know what to expect," Nathan says. Baber sat them down and began explaining the weapon. He showed them the high-speed camera. After shooting off a few magazines with the AA-12, Nathan says, "I realized we were dealing with somebody who was really skilled."

The Gettingses had brought a robot along, and the three men decided to attach one of Baber's recoilless M-16s. Adam took an hour to set it up, and they took it outside. They shot off one bullet, and when that seemed to work they tried ten, and then thirty. Baber was giddy, proclaiming it to be the future of warfare. "That is a murderous little bastard," he said.

Robotex's nominal testing facility, at the time I visited, was in a rented peach-colored bungalow in Palo Alto. "Here's the safe house," Adam joked, as we pulled into the driveway. Inside, the house had gray pile carpet and low ceilings. It was devoid of furniture except for a few storage shelves stacked with electronics and robot parts. A surfboard was propped against a wall. In one bedroom, discarded robot prototypes sat partially disassembled. Two updates of the robots I'd seen at Baber's house were outfitted with toy guns.

Adam, who is tall and loose-limbed, with short brown hair and glasses, switched on one of the robots. "This one is twice as fast as the one that Jerry has," he said, maneuvering it the length of the house as we watched on a monitor. He steered it into the bathroom, navigating it smoothly around the toilet.

Adam then slipped on a vest that the

company has built to house the robot's controllers. He clipped a tiny viewing screen onto his glasses, allowing him a robot's-eye view. "It's a video-game-style interface," he said. In fact, the controller is adapted from a Microsoft Xbox. Adam estimated that the average soldier could learn the basics of driving and firing the robot in the couple of hours it might take him to become proficient in a first-person-shooter video game.

I later asked Adam if he had contemplated making the robots more autonomous. "Oh, yeah," he said. At first, he said, a robot might be able to handle certain pieces of terrain on its own, without help from a joystick. "Automating firing, that's taboo," he said. But, with a little programming, "you could definitely do targeting and tracking. You could have it identify targets, A, B, and C, put squares around them. Then just hit a button and decide which person to take out."

On my last afternoon in Tennessee, Baber took me in his Impala to lunch at a restaurant outside of town, not far from the Blue Ridge Parkway. After we ordered, Baber explained why his version of an armed robot was destined to succeed. "Try to put a current military machine gun on a small robot, O.K.?" he said. "The recoil is so bad that you can't hit anything with it!"

I asked Baber if his friends knew about the arsenal he kept at his house. "Oh, I don't really have friends," he said. "But there's always somebody here. I'm never without people, because they are coming all the time, from all over the place, to look." The week before, it was a group of F.B.I. agents from Quantico, Virginia, who were interested in using the robots for law enforcement. ("I think this is the wave of the future," one later told me. "But it's almost too scary to have this thing out there right now.") And, not too long ago, a gun buyer working on behalf of the Jordanian government showed up to videotape the AA-12 in action. King Abdullah II had taken a personal interest in Baber's creations and the Jordanians agreed to purchase a pair of the guns for testing, a deal which currently awaits State Department approval. An Israeli defense contractor came to Piney Flats and discussed buying some AA-12s for the Israeli Defense Forces to test. But, given the hassle of export restrictions, Roos says, Baber decided to focus on selling to the military at home.

Sometimes, Baber's friends and business partners suggest, his sales approach can be a touch too forceful. "He's not a salesperson, I hate to tell you," Boje Cornils, a tool-and-die maker who works with Baber, said. "Jerry will talk, talk, talk, and not listen." Mostly, Baber has the stubbornness of an engineer who believes he alone holds the answers. He told me that when Remington recently called him to discuss buying his operation, he told them to forget it. "I'm gonna be that cantankerous old bastard down in Tennessee that says, 'I'm not gonna sell,'" he said. (Remington declined to comment.)

A few months ago, Baber decided to design his own mini-helicopter, one light enough to disassemble and carry in a backpack. After a successful test flight in January, he is currently busy building the new U.A.V.'s gun and mortar mounts. Meanwhile, he and his partners have been in talks with the Army's Rapid Equipping Force and other branches, and plan to show off the AA-12s and the robots to weapons testers for the United States Special Operations Command, next month. Two of Baber's guns are being tested by Pentagon R. & D. centers on their own unmanned vehicles. Out in California, Robotex received a new round of venture funding, expanding to new offices and a staff of ten, and are in negotiations to supply a Special Forces division with some of its unarmed robots. The military, Baber hoped, was finally starting to wake up to "the way all future wars are gonna be fought."

In the car on the way back to Piney Flats, Baber picked up his sales pitch midstream: "I've looked at these robots from pretty much every angle that they need to be. So when they get into the field they're gonna do what they're supposed to do." In the end, the argument for robots came down to a simple proposition. "There've always been wars," Baber said. "If you don't want to die yourself, you better kill the enemy. I'm doing a great service for our country and our servicemen."

"If they buy it," I said.

"They'll buy it," he said. "No question. They'll buy it." ♦

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A REPORTER AT LARGE

THE HARD CASES

Will Obama institute a new kind of preventive detention for terrorist suspects?

BY JANE MAYER

The last "enemy combatant" being detained in America is incarcerated at the U.S. Naval Consolidated Brig in Charleston, South Carolina—a tan, low-slung building situated amid acres of grassy swampland. The prisoner, known internally as EC#2, is an alleged Al Qaeda sleeper agent named Ali Saleh Kahlah al-Marri. He has been held in isolation in the brig for more than five years, although he has never stood trial or been convicted of any crime. Under rules established by the Bush Administration, suspected terrorists such as Marri were denied the legal protections traditionally afforded by the Constitution. Unless the Obama Administration overhauls the nation's terrorism policies, Marri—who claims that he is innocent—will likely spend the rest of his life in prison.

On September 10, 2001, Marri, a citizen of Qatar, who is now forty-three, came to America with his family. He had a student visa, and his ostensible purpose was to study computer programming at a small university in Peoria, Illinois. That December, he was arrested as a material witness in an investigation of the September 11th attacks. However, when Marri was on the verge of standing trial, in June, 2003, President George W. Bush ordered the military to seize him and hold him indefinitely. The Bush Administration contended that America was in a full-fledged war against terrorists, and that the President could therefore invoke extraordinary executive powers to detain Marri until the end of hostilities, on the basis of still secret evidence. That day, Marri was put on a military jet to Charleston, and since then he has been living as the only prisoner in an eighty-bed high-security wing of the brig, with no visits from family, friends, or the media.

Jonathan Hafetz, a lawyer with the American Civil Liberties Union, who has taken the lead role in Marri's legal defense, says that the Bush Administration's decision to leave him in sustained isolation was akin to stranding him on a desert island. "It's a Robinson Crusoe-like situation," he told me. In 2005, Hafetz challenged the constitutionality of Marri's imprisonment. A lower court affirmed the government's right to detain him indefinitely. After several appeals, the case is scheduled to be heard by the Supreme Court in April. Hafetz calls the Marri case a pivotal test of "the most far-reaching use of detention powers" ever asserted by an American President.

The Court's calendar requires the Obama Administration to file a reply to the challenge by March 23rd. Unless some kind of diversionary action is taken—such as sending Marri home to Qatar, or working out a plea agreement—the Court's schedule will likely force the Obama Administration to offer quick answers to a host of complicated questions about its approach to fighting terrorism.

John Bellinger III, who served as the counsel to the State Department under President Bush, says of officials in the Obama Administration, "They will have to either put up or shut up. Do they maintain the Bush Administration position, and keep holding Marri as an enemy combatant? They have to come up with a legal theory."

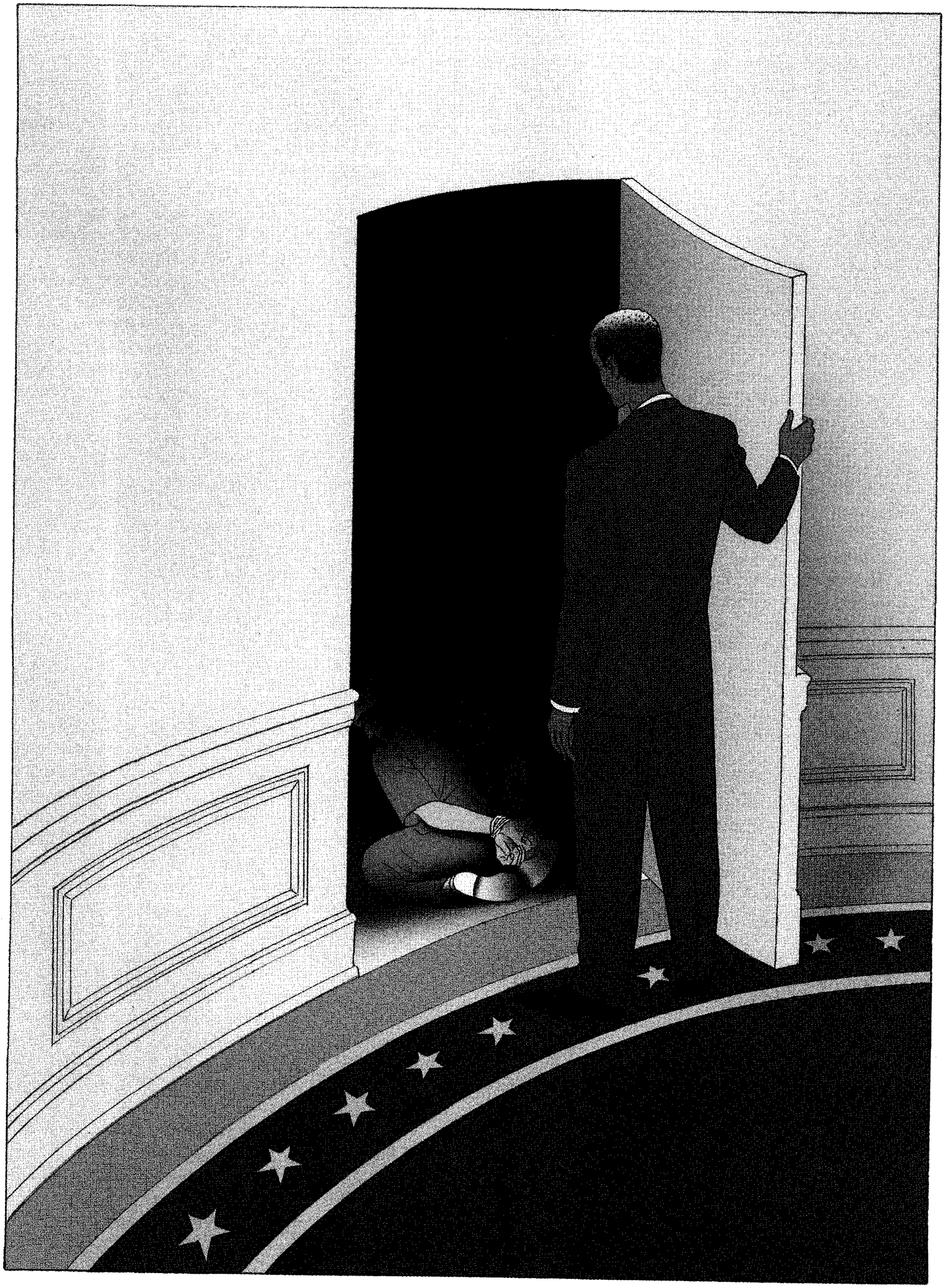
Among the issues to be decided, Hafetz says, is "the question of who is a soldier, and who is a civilian. Is the fight against terrorism war, or is it not war? How far does the battlefield extend? In the past, they treated Peoria as a battlefield. Can an American be arrested in his own home and jailed indefinitely, on the say-so of the President?" Hafetz wants the Supreme Court to rule that indefinite executive detention is illegal, and he hopes that Obama will withdraw Bush's executive order labelling Marri an enemy combatant, and issue a new one classifying him as a civilian. This shift would allow Marri either to be charged with crimes or to be released.

The Obama Administration's strategy in the Marri case will almost certainly establish legal principles that will have ramifications for future cases, as well as for the two hundred and forty or so similarly designated "unlawful enemy combatants" held in the military prison at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba. During the Bush years, the designation encompassed not just members of Al Qaeda and the Taliban but also anyone who associated with them, supported them, or supported organizations associated with them, even if unwittingly. In 2004, a Bush Administration lawyer told a judge that, in theory, an enemy combatant could even be "a little old lady in Switzerland" whose charitable donations had been channelled, without her awareness, to Al Qaeda front groups.

If the Marri case reaches the Supreme Court, it will test the limits of such theories. The case is therefore being closely watched by civil libertarians on both the left and the right. The Center for Constitutional Rights, a liberal advocacy organization, and the Cato and Rutherford Institutes, which lean to the right, are among the many legal groups that have signed eighteen amicus briefs on Marri's behalf. Individual lawyers who have taken up his cause include Nicholas Katzenbach, the Attorney General in the Johnson Administration, and William Sessions, who was appointed director of the F.B.I. by President Reagan. The editorial page of the *Times* has written repeatedly about the case, demanding that the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals' affirmation of Marri's military detention be reversed: "People accused of bad deeds should be tried in court—not in sham proceedings. They should be put in jail—not secret detention."

No matter how Obama responds to the case, his decision is likely to arouse controversy. Hafetz says, "If President Obama is serious about restoring the rule of law in America, they can't defend what's been done to Marri. They would be completely buying into the Bush Administration's war on terror." This view is

GUY BILLOUT



"We don't own the problem," Greg Craig, the White House counsel, says. "But we'll be held accountable for how we handle this."

widely held by Obama's political base. Yet the political risks of change are obvious. In 2004, Jeffrey Rapp, an analyst at the Defense Intelligence Agency, claimed in a sworn affidavit, without providing evidence, that Marri had met with Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan, and "offered to be an al Qaeda martyr." The government's theory is that Marri came to America in order to help carry out a second wave of terrorist attacks. "Al-Marri must be detained to prevent him from aiding al Qaeda in its efforts to attack the United States," Rapp said in his statement, which is the sole public document offering reasons for holding him.

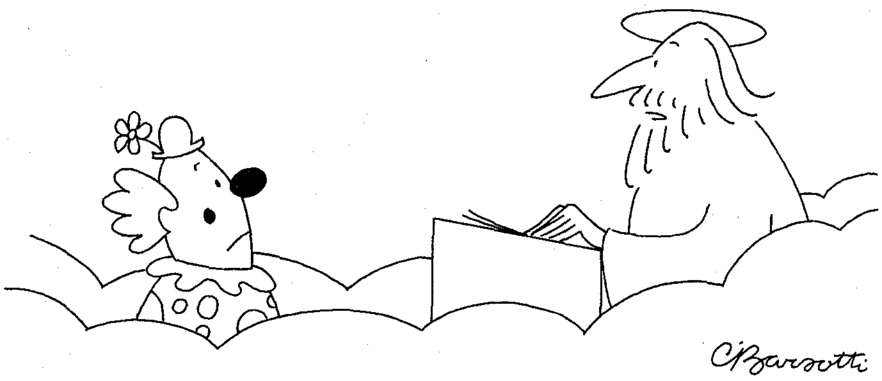
In early February, former Vice-President Dick Cheney increased the pressure on Obama, by warning that a catastrophic nuclear or biological terrorist attack on America would occur unless Obama kept the Bush policies in place. In an unusually contentious interview for an erstwhile high official, Cheney told *Politico* that the Obama Administration was "more concerned about reading the rights to an Al Qaeda terrorist than they are with protecting the United States." Two days after Cheney's remarks were published, the White House was visited by families of victims killed in the September 11th attacks and in the bombing of the U.S.S. Cole, in 2000. Some of those families have organized an advocacy group, Military Families United, which claims sixty thousand members, and which has circulated a petition demanding that Congress reject all efforts by the Obama Administration to relocate any detained terrorist suspects to its members' districts.

Amid such competing viewpoints, a compromise idea has also emerged, which the Obama Administration is weighing. A number of national-security lawyers in both parties favor the creation of some new form of preventive detention. They do not believe that it is the President's prerogative to lock "enemy combatants" up indefinitely, yet they fear that neither the criminal courts nor the military system is suited for the handling of transnational terrorists, whom they do not consider to be ordinary criminals or conventional soldiers. Instead, they suggest that Obama should work with Congress to write new laws, possibly creating a "national-security court," which could order certain suspects to be held without a trial.

One proponent of this idea is Neal Katyal, whom Obama recently named to the powerful post of Principal Deputy Solicitor General, in the Justice Department. Katyal is best known for his victory as the lead counsel in Hamdan v. Rumsfeld (2006). In his first appearance before the Supreme Court, he persuaded a majority of the Justices to declare that the Guantánamo military-commission system was illegal, arguing that Congress had not authorized the commissions. Katyal's new job is to represent the government before the Supreme Court. Given the sensitivity of this role, Katyal declined to comment for this story. But in October he posted an article on a Web site affiliated with Georgetown Law, in which he argued, "What is needed is a serious plan to prosecute everyone we can in regular courts, and a separate system to deal with the very small handful of cases in which patently dangerous people cannot be tried." This new system, he wrote, would give the government the "ability to temporarily detain a dangerous individual," including in situations where "a criminal trial has failed." There are hundreds of legal variations that could be considered, he said. In 2007, Katyal published a related essay, co-written with Jack L. Goldsmith, a conservative Harvard Law School professor who served as the head of the Office of Legal Counsel in the Bush Justice Department. The essay argued that preventive detention, overseen by a congressionally authorized national-security court, was necessary to insure the "sensible" treatment of classified evidence, and to protect secret "sources and methods" of gathering intelligence. In his Web post, Katyal wrote, "I support such a security court."

Such schemes have already stirred considerable controversy elsewhere in the world, including in Great Britain, where since 2005 some three dozen terror suspects have been detained for a time under house-arrest-like conditions, in some cases being required to wear ankle monitors, obey curfews, and refrain from using phones or the Internet. In America, such a compromise is sure to alarm many human-rights advocates and civil libertarians, who regard indefinite detention as antithetical to the American legal system's most basic tenets. Alberto Mora, a Republican lawyer who, as general counsel of the Navy, broke with the Bush Administration after concluding that some of its brutal counter-terrorism policies were potential war crimes, warns, "We simply can't have indefinite detention. Due process and fundamental fairness make that clear."

Marri himself is cautiously hopeful. Despite restrictions on his consumption of television and print news, he followed the Presidential campaign from inside the brig. According to Hafetz, "He's happy about Obama, but worried he won't be able to fulfill all the promises and expectations." Through his lawyers, Marri, speaking publicly for the first time, said, "I am not asking to be taken at my word and to be released, although I very much want to go home to my family. All I am asking for is to be treated like every other person in the United States who is accused of a crime, including terrorism, and to be given a fair trial in an American court."



"Well, that was a birthday party the kids won't soon forget."

As a candidate, Obama promised a sharp break with the Bush Administration's counter terrorism policies. In a written statement for the Boston *Globe,* Obama, who taught constitutional law in the nineteen-nineties, said, "I reject the Bush Administration's claim that the President has plenary authority under the Constitution to detain U.S. citizens without charges as unlawful enemy combatants." (In fact, the Bush Administration went beyond this claim, arguing that Congress had explicitly granted the President this authority, in a bill passed after the attacks.) In the *Globe*, Obama went on, "The detention of American citizens, without access to counsel, fair procedure, or pursuant to judicial authorization, as enemy combatants is unconstitutional." In his Inaugural Address, Obama further underscored his differences with Bush in this area, saying, "As for our common defense, we reject as false the choice between our safety and our ideals." A top legal adviser to Obama told me that the President also believes that legal residents in America, like Marri, are entitled to due process.

Former Bush Administration officials who were involved in its anti-terror program suggest that Obama may find it harder than expected to translate idealistic rhetoric into action. "Governing is different from campaigning," says Bellinger, who predicts that Obama and his officials will soon discover that "they can't just set the clocks back eight years, and try every terror suspect captured abroad in the federal courts." Bellinger now says that the treatment of Marri was a "failed experiment." John Ashcroft, who was Attorney General when Marri was designated an enemy combatant, makes no such apologies. Interviewed just before the Inauguration, he defended what he described as a "sound decision" to "maximize the national interest," and predicted that, in the end, President Obama's approach to handling terror suspects would closely mirror his own: "How will he be different? The main difference is going to be that he spells his name 'O-b-a-m-a,' not 'B-u-s-h.' "

So far, the Obama Administration has declined to state a position on the Marri case. It's already becoming apparent, though, that Ashcroft was mistaken in his broader point. Obama, in his first week in office, issued three executive orders, undoing many of the most controversial elements of the Bush Administration's detention and interrogation programs. Most notably, Obama declared that the Administration hoped to close Guantánamo within a year. A little noticed memorandum issued at the time of the orders was dedicated to Marri. It called for a Cabinet-level inter-agency task force, led by Attorney General Eric Holder, to review Marri's case, with an eye toward finding alternative ways to deal with him.

The same officials will review the status of the enemy combatants held in Guantánamo. The Obama Administration has indicated that it hopes to return the majority of the detainees to other countries, or to try them in civilian and military courts. The looming question, however, is whether there is a category of terror suspect whose status precludes such options. It's unclear whether some home countries can provide fair trials or secure prisons. More important, the high standard of evidence required in U.S. courts—guilt must be proved "beyond a reasonable doubt"—might result in dangerous individuals being set free.

Qatar has made known its interest in having Marri come home. But the Obama Administration has to decide whether he poses a recidivism risk—an assessment that has to be made, in part, on the basis of statements elicited through torture. (Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, the self-described mastermind of the 9/11 plot, was waterboarded by the C.I.A., and reportedly said that Marri was a fellow-terrorist.) As such, Marri may exemplify what Greg Craig, Obama's White House counsel, calls "the toughest question" facing the Administration as it tries to bring the Bush program within the rule of law: what to do with the so-called "third category" of detainees—suspects who may be difficult to convict under the American standards of justice, but who may pose a palpable threat if released.

Depending upon how many such "hard cases" exist, Craig says, the Administration will decide whether new laws, including possibly those enabling some sort of preventive detention, are necessary. Although the detainees from the Bush era pose the most immediate problem, he said, it's possible that the new Administration may also want to handle future prisoners outside the existing criminal- and military-court system. "A good deal of policy research remains," he said. "The door was not left open by accident. Obama wants the freedom to hear the recommendations of the most experienced and smartest people, on how to protect the American people while still respecting the rules of the road on liberty." He suggested that the Administration would prefer not to go in that direction. "It's possible but hard to imagine Barack Obama as the first President of the United States to introduce a preventive-detention law," Craig said. "Our presumption is that there is no need to create a whole new system. Our system is very capable." Then again, the idea is not being ruled out, which may be surprising to some constituents, given Obama's past support for civil liberties and Craig's own record—in the early nineties, he served as the chairman of the board of the International Human Rights Law Group, an advocacy organization now known as Global Rights.

Obama's legal team is aware that every step it takes will be seen as an indication of core convictions. Craig, who will coördinate the revamping of the Bush Administration's legal policies on terrorism, said, "One way we've looked at this is that we own the solution. We don't own the problem—it was created by the previous Administration. But we'll be held accountable for how we handle this."

The Obama Administration has already inflamed some members of the human-rights community. On February 9th, the Justice Department adopted the same position that Bush had taken in a case filed by the American Civil Liberties Union. The government attempted to squelch a lawsuit initiated by a group of terrorist suspects—one of whom had allegedly been tortured in Morocco after being transferred there by the C.I.A.—on the ground that it would open up state secrets. Scott Horton, a law professor at Columbia University, characterized the new Justice Department's position as a betrayal of the "promises of transparency and accountability" made by Obama during the campaign.

The first step in cases such as Marri's, Craig suggests, will be to evaluate the "dangerousness" of each detainee, and to scrutinize all documents passed on by the previous Administration. "We need the facts," he said. "And we need fresh eyes." For years, John Ashcroft has justified the military detention of Marri as a safety precaution. "Sometimes the criminal courts are not up to it," he told me. But, as the new team reviews Marri's story, it will likely find ample grounds to reassess the notion that the courts can't handle terror suspects, and that such suspects can't be safely housed in the United States without incident.

In a recent interview, David Kelley, a former U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of New York, who supervised the early stages of the Marri case, revealed that he had warned his bosses in the Justice Department that they were making a mistake by sidestepping the criminal courts. Kelley co-chaired the Justice Department's nationwide investigation into the 9/11 attacks, and headed the investigations into the 2000 attack on the U.S.S. Cole, in Yemen, and the 1998 bombings of the U.S. Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania; he also led the prosecution of Ramzi Yousef, in the 1993 World Trade Center bombing. In 2003, he successfully prosecuted John Walker Lindh, the American accused of aiding the Taliban. In the interview, Kelley said he believed that the government had a strong case against Marri: he had been charged with credit-card fraud, bank fraud, identity theft, and lying to a federal agent. He thought that Marri could be convicted in a matter of a few months, and sentenced to years in prison. Kelley, who is now a partner at Cahill Gordon, in Manhattan, was disappointed when, on the basis of a one-page executive order, Marri was suddenly sent to the brig. "My view is, we haven't really exhausted the potential for using the criminal-justice system," he said.

James Benjamin, a former federal prosecutor in the Southern District of New York, is now a partner at the law firm Akin Gump. In 2008, he co-wrote a review of the Marri case, characterizing the switch to military detention as counterproductive. "Definitely, the criminal-justice system can handle someone like Marri," he told me. "They caught him under the criminal-justice system. And, based on what we know, they were poised to convict him." What happened to Marri before he was moved "proves the system was up to it."

Marty Lederman, a former Georgetown Law professor, whom Obama has appointed to be a deputy in the Justice Department's Office of Legal Counsel, argues that the Bush Administration's claims to be acting out of necessity were "nonsense." In an essay published before he joined the Administration, Lederman wrote, "Even if everything the government alleges about al-Marri's ties to al Qaeda are true," he was not a danger "because he was already incapacitated—imprisoned—within the criminal justice system, where his trial was pending."

Marri had aroused the suspicion of law-enforcement officers almost as soon as he arrived in the Midwest with his wife, Maha, who spoke no English, and their five young children. His timing was conspicuous—he arrived in Chicago the day before 9/11. The next day, the family took a hundred-and-fifty-mile taxi ride to Peoria.

Marri enrolled in computer-science classes at Bradley University, where he and a brother had obtained undergraduate degrees. Qatar, which has one of the highest per-capita incomes in the world, pays college tuition for many of its citizens, and several members of the Marri family have attended school in America. According to the Washington *Post*, as an undergraduate at Bradley Marri wore a ponytail and was known for his partying and his quick sense of humor. He returned to Qatar in 1991, after graduation. Later that decade, a palace coup in Qatar shook his family, eventually prompting some members to leave for Saudi Arabia, where many of his brothers and his wife now live. Marri reportedly ended up in Afghanistan. According to the sworn statement given by Jeffrey Rapp, the D.I.A. analyst, at some point between 1996 and 1998 Marri was trained in chemical weaponry at an Al Qaeda camp there. (Marri, through his lawyer, denied these allegations.)

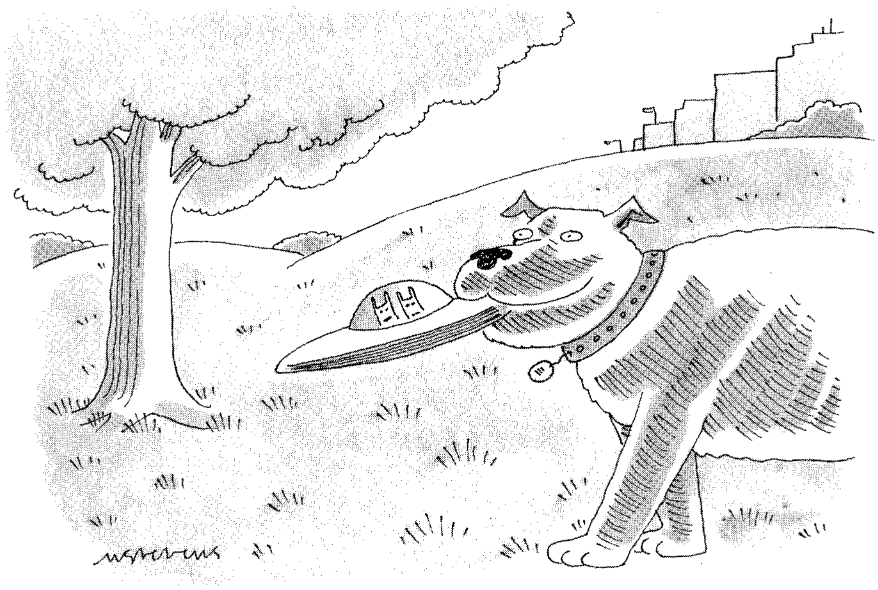
Patrick Theros, who was the U.S. Ambassador to Qatar during this period, is skeptical of the terrorism allegations. "I've never heard anyone say this Qatari kid did *anything*," he told me. Theros described Qatar as both religiously conservative and tolerant, and says that as far as he knows it is home to virtually no violent radical Islamic movements.

In the summer of 2000, Marri returned to Illinois, where he allegedly registered a carpet business in Macomb, and opened multiple bank accounts, under a false name and Social Security number. When he went back in the fall of 2001, according to the Washington *Post*, he had a briefcase filled with hundred-dollar bills. Rapp's statement claims that Marri had obtained more than thirteen thousand dollars in cash from Mustafa Ahmed al-Hawsawi, the financier in the United Arab Emirates who is known to have bankrolled the September 11th hijackers. Phone records apparently offered further evidence of a tie between Marri and Hawsawi.

Law-enforcement authorities pieced together this picture bit by bit. In September, according to the *Post*, local police stopped Marri while he was driving, checked his license, and discovered an outstanding warrant for drunken driving, dating back to his earlier student days, as well as the briefcase filled with cash. The police notified the F.B.I. Several weeks later, his lawyers say, a cell-phone salesman, noting discrepancies in Marri's identification documents, also called the bureau. In October and December, 2001, F.B.I. agents interviewed Marri; they say that he offered to let them search his laptop computer, his minivan, and his small rental apartment. Later, Marri's lawyers argued that the agents had failed to obtain a warrant, and that the information from the search could therefore not be admitted into evidence. According to Rapp's statement, Marri's computer was filled with information on deadly poisons, including a step-by-step guide to making hydrogen cyanide—a toxic substance that can be used in poison-gas attacks. Marri, in claiming his innocence, has had no chance to see the evidence against him. Asked recently why he was researching such chemicals, Marri, through his lawyers, gave his first public answer. He was "doing research for a family member in the petrochemical industry to be used for industrial purposes. The research involved visiting Web sites that contained hundreds of nonpoisonous chemicals (not just cyanide). And even cyanide has numerous industrial uses."

The laptop also reportedly contained lectures by bin Laden, and unsent e-mails to an address that Rapp said was connected to Khalid Sheikh Mohammed. Some of Marri's e-mails were encoded. Upon discovering this information in his laptop, the F.B.I. arrested Marri as a material witness to its investigation of the attacks. Soon after, he was charged with credit-card fraud and with failing to tell the F.B.I. about his 2000 visit to America and his phone calls to Hawsawi.

On the morning of June 23, 2003, only days before Marri's defense team was to make its arguments about suppressing the laptop and other evidence, one of his lawyers received a phone call informing him that a U.S. Attorney would be making an unexpected appearance at the courthouse



"They seem friendly enough so far."

that day. President Bush, the lawyers soon learned, had signed an executive order directing the military to seize Marri. "We should have seen it for what it was—the foreshadowing of an Administration that was going to forsake the Constitution in the war on terror," Lawrence Lustberg, one of the earliest defense lawyers on what has come to be Marri's team, said. "From then on, we didn't see Marri or hear from him again until late 2004. He just went into the abyss."

Before agreeing to transfer Marri to the brig, however, the presiding judge in the case ruled that the White House would be barred from charging Marri again with the same crimes. In legal jargon, the original charges were "dismissed with prejudice," to protect Marri's right not to be placed in "double jeopardy." As a result, if the Obama Administration decides to charge him in the criminal system now, it has to bring a different set of charges, unless Marri's lawyers offer a deal. Benjamin, the former prosecutor, insists that "there is a whole bag of tools for dealing with truly bad guys—there are many other statutes that the government could explore, including material support of terrorism, conspiracy charges, and mail- and wire-fraud charges." But, he suggests, by taking Marri outside the regular criminal system "there's no doubt they made all kinds of problems for themselves."

Andrew McCarthy, a former federal terrorism prosecutor who writes for *National Review*, defends Marri's transfer to the brig. "Sure, the criminal-justice system, by permitting Marri's pretrial detention, neutralized him, at least for a time," he says. "But there's always the chance the court will release a defendant on bail." Moreover, he argues that open criminal trials run many risks, including the accidental, or oblique, disclosure of classified information. It's also unclear how to handle witnesses who may themselves be terrorists: they may demand immunity before they will talk. Or it may be that their testimony was obtained by unsavory means, which could scuttle a conviction.

In the Marri case, however, it does not appear that a fear of losing led Bush to transfer him to the Navy brig. Kelley, for example, thought that the case the government had was "solid." Instead, it appears that the real motive was frustration on the part of the Justice Department at being unable to make Marri confess. Kelley was told to push him hard, which he did, but Marri kept professing his innocence. As Ashcroft wrote in his 2006 book about fighting terrorism, "Never Again," "Al-Marri rejected numerous offers to improve his lot by cooperating with the F.B.I. investigators and providing information. He insisted on becoming a 'hard case.' " Mark Berman, an early member of Marri's defense team, asserts that the Bush Administration "really just wanted to interrogate him" in a rough manner. "No doubt about it."

The right to remain silent is a fundamental aspect of the American justice system. Justice John Paul Stevens, dissenting in the 2004 case Rumsfeld v. Padilla, wrote, "Executive detention of subversive citizens, like detention of enemy soldiers to keep them off the battlefield, may sometimes be justified to prevent persons from launching or becoming missiles of destruction. It may not, however, be justified by the naked interest in using unlawful procedures to extract information. Incommunicado detention for months on end is such a procedure. . . . For if this Nation is to remain true to the ideals symbolized by its flag, it must not wield the tools of tyrants even to resist an assault by the forces of tyranny."

The summer of 2003, when Marri entered the brig, was the height of the Bush Administration's program of authorized abusive interrogations. The C.I.A. had just taken Khalid Sheikh Mohammed into custody, and was using extreme measures to make him divulge information (much of which he later recanted). Marri was among those whom Mohammed apparently implicated during this period. By then, Bush appointees in the Justice Department had produced numerous memos advising the C.I.A. and the Pentagon that there were virtually no legal impediments to the use of physical and psychological force to break "unlawful enemy combatants." Suspects considered especially "high value" were subjected to extreme sensory deprivation and other harsh tactics, which were modelled on Soviet and Chinese torture programs that had been studied and copied by the C.I.A.

Inside the Charleston brig, documents show, officials were ordered to follow the same rules as those at Guantánamo. Lustberg, however, says, "I've been to Guantánamo. Marri was far more isolated. He had *no* contact with any other detainees. Most days, he had no human contact at all."

For the first six months, Marri was kept in an eight-foot-by-ten-foot cell with one blacked-out window, no social interaction, and nothing to do or to read. An internal report, declassified in 2005, showed that during this period the Department of Defense ordered the removal of the mattress, pillow, and Koran of a detainee in the brig. Marri was also deprived of visits from the Red Cross, in violation of international laws. He was denied hot food, and consistently felt cold: he was given no socks, and his bed had only a stiff “anti-suicide” blanket—one that cannot be made into a noose. Andrew Savage, the local counsel for Marri in Charleston, says, “It was a psychological effort to devalue him. He was going crazy. He thought the smells from the nearby paper mill were poisoning him.” At other points, Marri started feeling “tingles” all over, and began hallucinating that microphones had been installed in his cell. “He was getting delusional,” Savage said.

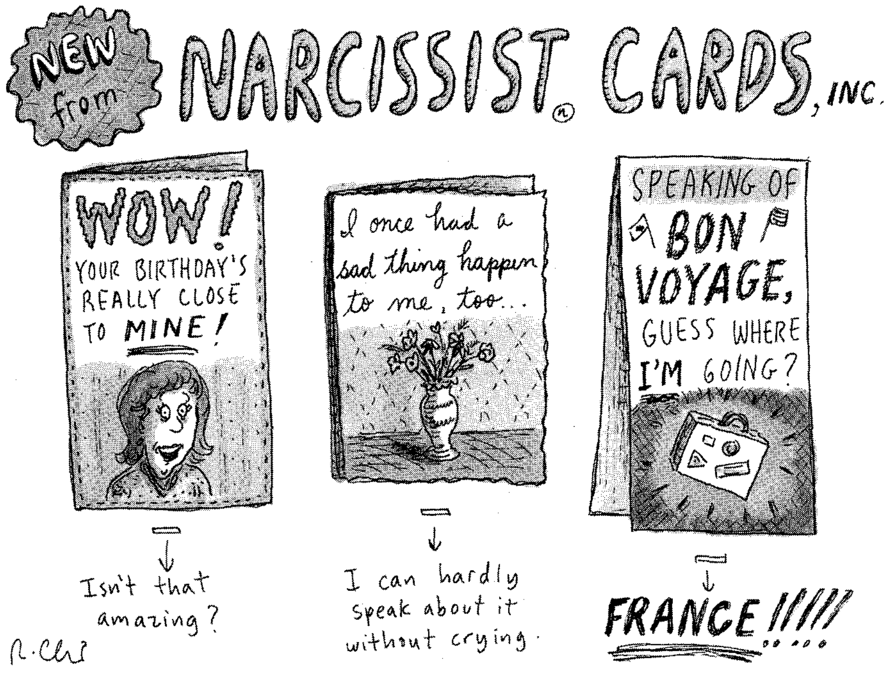
When unidentified interrogators finally showed up at the brig, Marri told them that he needed three things: a blanket, shoes, and socks. If he was given those, he said, he would talk to them in another six months. “He said, ‘You deprive me? I’ll deprive you,’” Savage said. Instead, “the interrogators got rougher.” Marri was chained in a fetal position on the floor. When he started to chant prayers rather than listen to the interrogators’ questions, Savage said, they tried to silence him by wrapping duct tape around his mouth. When he kept humming, they tried to gag him. But as they started to tape a sock in his mouth he began to choke, causing the agents to panic and stop. The episode was documented by closed-circuit surveillance cameras, Pentagon officials have confirmed.

A spokesperson for Lieutenant General Michael Maples, the director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, told the *Times* that Maples considered Marri’s treatment “acceptable.” But the Pentagon has refused to share the tape of the gagging, which evidently still exists, with Marri’s defense team. Though the Defense Department has admitted to erasing a number of other tapes of Marri, the surviving tapes could prove damaging should the case go to trial.

Despite the so-called “enhanced” interrogation tactics used on Marri, he continued to insist that he had never met Osama bin Laden, was not a terrorist, and wished the U.S. no harm. If Marri was cast into military detention in order to make him confess, it didn’t work. “I’m not surprised,” Kelley said. “I don’t know of many instances where other agencies have got more out of defendants than the F.B.I. can.”

In October, 2004, after a sixteen-month blackout, Marri’s defense lawyers were finally allowed to meet with him again. The Supreme Court had just ruled, in Rasul v. Bush and in Hamdi v. Rumsfeld, that “unlawful enemy combatants” were entitled to legal representation and some form of due process. As three of his defense lawyers watched from one side of a glass partition, Marri was brought in wearing a belly chain and shackles, which were bolted to the floor. Guards wearing black gloves and covered I.D. tags stood by.

“It was unbelievably emotional,” Lustberg recalls. “We had fought so hard for the right to see him. He was obviously suffering the effects of long-term isolation. He seemed paranoid, scattered, distracted, and disturbed. He was showing signs of mental illness.” Berman recalls, “He was much thinner. Mentally, he’d been through a lot. He was a little off-kilter.”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WOW! YOUR BIRTHDAY'S REALLY CLOSE TO MINE!
Isn't that amazing?
I once had a sad thing happen to me, too...
I can hardly speak about it without crying.
SPEAKING OF BON VOYAGE, GUESS WHERE I'M GOING?
FRANCE!!!!!

As the debate over indefinite detention intensifies, Marri’s example may prove cautionary to those who think that it can be designed in a humane way. Savage, the Charleston lawyer, now speaks to Marri by phone every few days, and visits him in person every other week. He believes that nothing has been tougher on his client than the uncertainty of not knowing if he would ever be released. “He would have preferred beatings,” Savage said. “He’d say, ‘Andy, it’s worse than beating.’ He wanted to be sent to Egypt to be renditioned. He’d say, ‘Torture me—but end it!’”

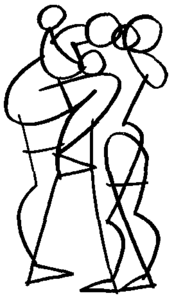
By the spring of 2005, Savage feared that Marri was, as he put it, “slipping away.” Previously undisclosed correspondence between Marri and his attorneys shows that he was thinking about getting a divorce; as he later explained to Savage, he thought that his wife should marry his brother rather than be abandoned in his absence. “I feel something will happen to me,” Marri wrote in February, 2005. “I want to make sure everything is documented.” Two months later, he wrote, “My body is tired & I don’t know how long I can take it anymore.” In the spring of 2007, Marri gave Savage power of attorney, as if preparing to die.

Given the reputation that military prisons have developed after the abuse scandals at Guantánamo and Abu Ghraib, the lawyers for Marri were surprised to discover that they had allies in the Navy brig who shared their concerns over Marri’s treatment. Unlike the staff at Abu Ghraib, the brig staff had been trained for the job. Their mission, as they saw it, was to run a safe, professional, and humane prison, regardless of who was held there. It was the political appointees in Washington, at the Pentagon and the Department of Justice, who wanted Marri to be kept in prolonged isolation. In 2005, Savage discovered that the head of security at the brig, Air Force Major Chris Ferry, “would stay all night with Marri. He’d go down to the brig and sit with him, and tell him to hold on. Chris was there at three in the morning, on the darkest nights." Geoff Morrell, a Pentagon spokesman, would not allow Ferry to be interviewed for this story, saying, "Given that President Obama has ordered a review of the al-Marri case, we feel it would be best to complete that work before publicly discussing any further the specific aspects of his detention or interrogation." Morrell added, "The Department of Defense treats all detainees humanely, and this is particularly true in the case of al-Marri, for whom we have taken extraordinary measures to insure his physical and mental well-being."

In 2005, Marri's lawyers filed suit against the Department of Defense, alleging that conditions at the brig were causing a "mental health emergency" for Marri. Savage said, "Later, we found the biggest lobbyists for improved conditions were . . . the staff of the brig. The commanders were terrific. They kept rotating through. My sense is that they saw things becoming too pressured psychologically. They're good G.I. Joes—they salute and follow orders. But they're human." Documents released in response to a Freedom of Information request by the Allard K. Lowenstein International Human Rights Clinic, at Yale Law School, show that unnamed officers in the brig worried that the enemy combatants being held there at the time were close to losing their sanity. "I fear the rubber band is near the breaking point," one internal e-mail said. Other e-mails show that unnamed brig staff officers fought to get the detainees almost anything to occupy their minds, from a deck of cards to a soccer ball. Their concern wasn't entirely altruistic. In his despair, Marri had increasingly become "non-compliant," covering the closed-circuit cameras in his cell with spitballs, refusing to eat, and throwing cups of his urine at guards.

After Savage filed suit, Marri's conditions started to improve, and so did his behavior. Marri was gradually given reading material and exercise equipment. A year after his father died, in 2007, an imam was sent to the brig to tell him. More recently, he was granted the right to make two phone calls a year to his family. (Last month, however, he was denied a visit from his eldest son.) Savage is now allowed to bring him Muslim religious texts, which he spends most of his time poring over, and kosher food from a deli in Charleston, whose method of food preparation resembles that prescribed by halal.

Marri's conditions have so improved that his lawyers jokingly refer to him these days as "the Emir of the S.H.U."—the high-security wing of the brig is known as the Special Housing Unit. He remains the sole prisoner in the wing, but he now has the regular use of three cells, which he refers to as his "executive suite." One cell contains a memory-foam mattress. Another houses a personal library containing hundreds of volumes. The third contains alcohol-free cleaning supplies, in compliance with his Muslim religious needs. When visitors come, he sees them in an upper-tier room that he calls his "summer chalet." He also has exclusive access to a thousand-square-foot dayroom equipped with a treadmill and an elliptical machine. Officially barred from watching the evening news, Marri has become a devotee of Stephen Colbert and Jon Stewart—whom he calls "that Jewish guy."



Marri is still not always a model prisoner. At one point, he became angry at Stephanie Wright, the brig's commander at the time, for being slow in getting him medicine that he had requested. He picked up a guard's two-way radio, which had been left unattended, and screamed into it, "Stephanie! This is me—Ali—EC#2! Move your ass!" His voice was heard over all the radios in the brig. Guards came running toward him. "I think he acted out for his own entertainment," Savage said.

Since prison censors cut many of the hard-news stories out of the papers he received, Marri began sending brig authorities frequent notes about local ads. As Savage recalls it, one note said, "It's a two-for-one sale on upholstered chairs! I'll take the purple—you can have the lime green."

Soon after Obama issued the executive order to close Guantánamo, Republican Senator Pat Roberts, of Kansas, called "unacceptable" any possibility that detainees might be moved to Fort Leavenworth, the Department of Defense's only maximum-security prison, which is in Roberts's home state. Senator Chris Bond, of Missouri, the ranking Republican on the Senate Intelligence Committee, warned that he could not "think of any city or town across this country that will be thrilled to have Khalid Sheikh Mohammad or Abu Zubaydah living down the street."

But in Charleston, where the only enemy combatant in America really does live down the street, the picture is more reassuring. In December, Marri, wearing goggles, earmuffs, a belly chain, and shackles, was led out of his cell block. No one told him where he was going, but the guards said that he had a visitor. The destination, it turned out, was the visitors' center, where the commander of the brig, John Pucciarelli, who was transferring out of the facility the next day, had two things to tell him. According to Savage, Pucciarelli said that he was sorry that he had been unable to do more for Marri, but he had treated him as well as he could. He also said that there was a gift waiting for Marri, back in the dayroom. When Marri returned, he found a thirty-two-inch-screen television.

Andrew Savage was delighted. Although he had been skeptical about Marri, he has become convinced that he poses no danger. "I don't fear him, not personally and not for the United States," Savage said. "Is he putting me on? Scamming me? Putting it over on me? I really don't think so. I'm not naïve. I've defended multi-murderers, child murderers, child molesters, and all sorts of violent criminals. But I really don't think Ali's a terrorist."

Michael McGovern, a former Assistant U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of New York, who indicted Marri, scoffs at Savage's notion that he is harmless. "I find that statement pretty remarkable, given that the evidence showed that he was communicating directly with the masterminds of the 9/11 attacks."

Before the Bush Administration's experiments with executive detention, the way to settle such disputes was in the courtroom. Depending on how Obama decides to move ahead, that situation may prevail again. If so, he will have history and tradition on his side. As Hafetz puts it, "In the more than two hundred and thirty years since this country's founding, we have not found a better way to find the truth than through a criminal trial." ♦

THE BACKGROUND HUM

Ian McEwan's art of unease.

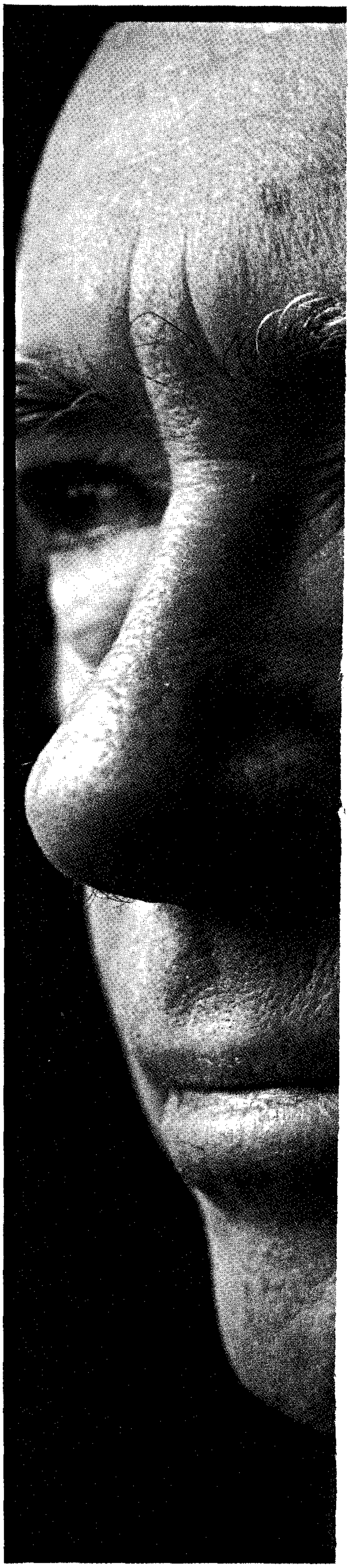
BY DANIEL ZALEWSKI

All novelists are scholars of human behavior, but Ian McEwan pursues the matter with more scientific rigor than the job strictly requires. On a recent hike through the woods surrounding his new country house—a renovated seventeenth-century brick-and-flint cottage, in Buckinghamshire—he regularly punctuated his observations about *Homo sapiens* with the citation of a peer-reviewed experiment. After discussing his many duplicitous characters—such as Briony Tallis, the precocious adolescent of his 2001 novel, "Atonement," who ruins two lives when she makes a false accusation of rape—McEwan pointed to a "study in cognitive psychology" suggesting that "the best way to deceive someone is first to deceive yourself," because you're more convincing when you're sincere. ("She trapped herself, she marched into the labyrinth of her own construction," McEwan writes of Briony. "Her doubts could be neutralized only by plunging in deeper.") Speaking of the way that the brain surgeon Henry Perowne, of his 2005 novel, "Saturday," struggles with the impulse to take revenge on a man who invades his home, McEwan made reference to brain scanners: "When people take revenge, the same reward centers of the brain are activated that are associated with satisfying hunger, thirst, sexual appetite. It was rather bleak, the perception."

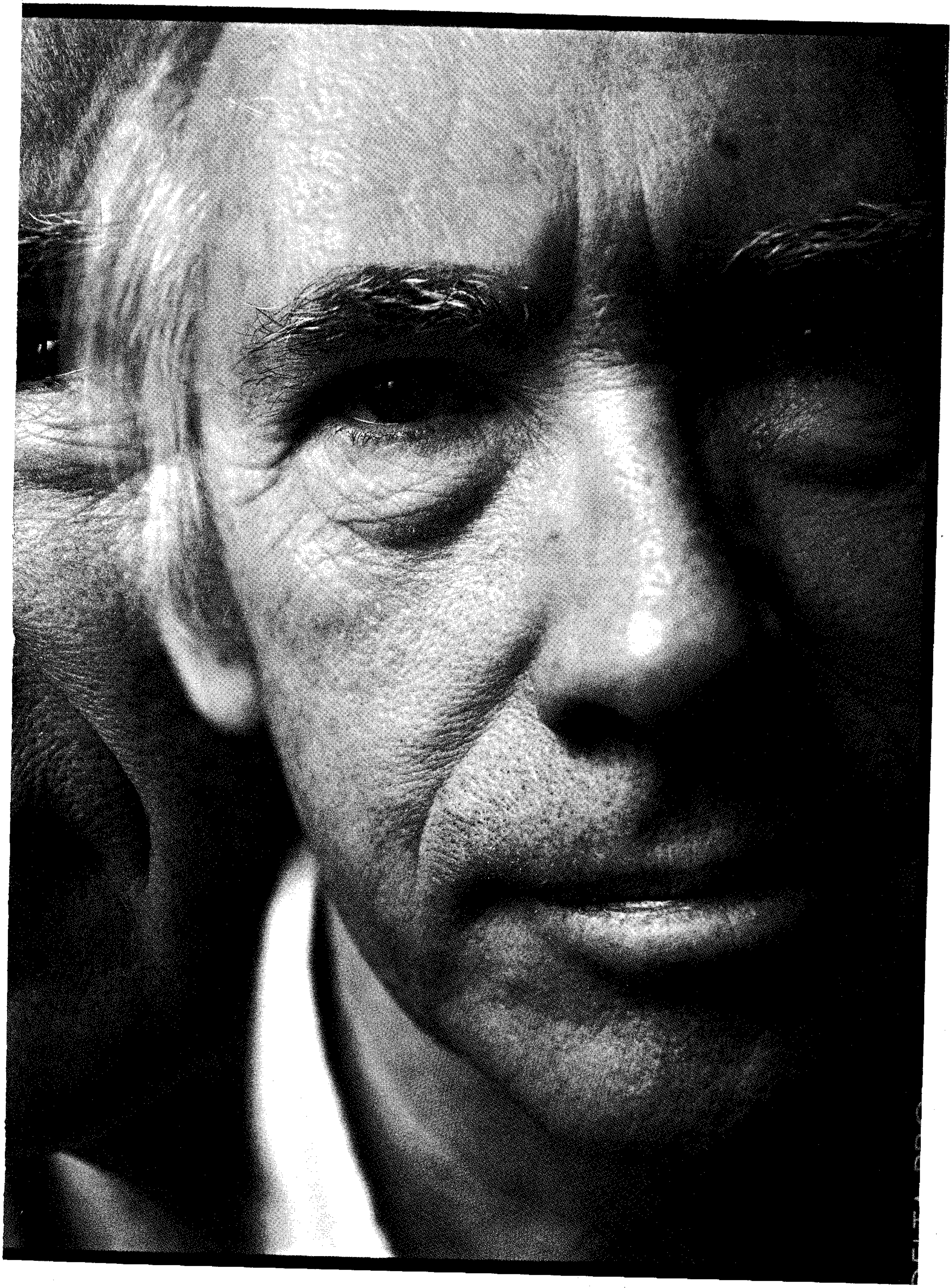
Writers have long been content to generate such insights on their own—somebody without the aid of a brain scanner came up with "revenge is sweet"—but McEwan is wary of relying too much on intuition. He has what he calls an "Augustan spirit," one nourished equally by the poems of Philip Larkin and by the papers in *Nature*. Indeed, he told me that his 1997 novel, "Enduring Love," in which a relentlessly rational man defeats a relentlessly irrational stalker, was conceived as a reply to the "unexamined Romantic assumption that still lingers in the contemporary novel, which is that intuition is good and reason bad."

McEwan's interest in science isn't antiseptic; it sets his mind at play. He is surely the only novelist who owns a tie patterned with images of a craniotome—a tool for drilling holes in the skull. When he spots an opportunity, he will conduct an amateur experiment. After he wrote the Nabokovian coda to "Enduring Love"—a pastiche of an academic case study of Jed Parry, the stalker—he mailed it to one of his best friends, Ray Dolan, who directs the Wellcome Trust Centre for Neuroimaging, in London. "The package appeared to be from a psychiatrist in Dublin," Dolan recalls. "It said, 'I just had this article published in the *British Journal of Psychiatry*.' It was formatted just like pieces in the journal, with two columns and a header. I sat down that evening to read it. I was halfway through before the penny dropped." Three years ago, McEwan culled the fiction library of his London town house, in Fitzroy Square. He and his younger son, Greg, handed out thirty novels in a nearby park. In an essay for the *Guardian*, McEwan reported that "every young woman we approached . . . was eager and grateful to take a book," whereas the men "could not be persuaded. 'Nah, nah. Not for me. Thanks, mate, but no.'" The researcher's conclusion: "When women stop reading, the novel will be dead."

McEwan's empirical temperament distinguishes him from his friends Martin Amis, Salman Rushdie, and Julian Barnes. McEwan recalls a recent afternoon spent with Barnes: "Julian was reading an article in the *Guardian* about a ship that, in 1893, got frozen in the polar ice. The explorers had set up a primitive wind turbine for electricity, and the captain's log described how they'd got it running just before the final sunset that marked



One of McEwan's goals is to "incite a naked hunger in readers." Photograph by Steve Pyke.



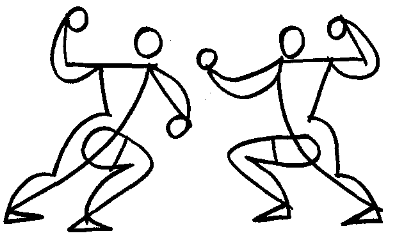
the beginning of the dark Arctic winter. Julian handed the story to me. I read it and said, 'That's amazing. A wind turbine in 1893!' He said, 'No, no, I mean the captain's description of the final sunset. What a beautiful piece of prose.' And I said, 'Oh. Yeah, yeah.' "

Perhaps the one thing that McEwan shares with his more Romantic peers is a love of the long walk. At sixty, he has probably rambled more miles than any English writer since Coleridge. For four decades, he has canvassed the Lake District and the Chilterns—the chalk hills between London and Oxford. Outside England, McEwan has conquered swaths of the Bernese Oberland, the Atlas Mountains, and the Dolomites. Usually, he walks slightly ahead of a companion, and his knapsack contains two stainless-steel cups and a very good bottle of wine. McEwan's journeys have grown even more exotic since the international success of "Atonement," which has sold more than four million copies since it was published. In the winter of 2007, after McEwan completed publicity rounds for the novella "On Chesil Beach" and the film of "Atonement," he and his wife, Annalena McAfee, a former editor at the *Guardian*, travelled for three months; they trekked the Himalayas, the Southern Alps of New Zealand, and the coast of Tasmania.

Our hike, on a breezy summer day, began in a sloping field of wildflowers behind McEwan's cottage. He had worked hard to create the pastel plot, now waist high. "A wildflower meadow is a matter of incredible artifice," he confessed at one point. "It's hard for flowers to defeat grass. I had a local farmer help me." A German gardener assists in maintaining the grounds.

McEwan was spending much of the summer in Buckinghamshire, trying to settle into a new novel. He said that "On Chesil Beach," which is about an English couple's disastrous wedding night, in 1962, had "struck a nerve in France," and interviewers were pursuing him in London again. At a moment when the hardback novel seems endangered, McEwan's work is almost scandalously popular. Although his novels headily explore ideas, and his gift for visual detail approaches that of John Updike (Briony's cousin, fondling a suitcase: "The polished metal was cool, and her touch left little patches of shrinking condensation"), his international success has a lot to do with an old-fashioned talent for creating suspense. His plots defy what he calls the "dead hand of modernism." (Even "Saturday," which takes place in a single day, has enough incident to rival "24": a plummeting plane, a car crash, a break-in, a tumble downstairs, lifesaving surgery.) McEwan said that one of his goals was to "incite a naked hunger in readers." He discussed his technique reluctantly, as if he were a chemist guarding a newly filed patent. "Narrative tension is primarily about withholding information," he said.

McEwan is a connoisseur of dread, performing the literary equivalent of turning on the tub faucet and leaving the room; the flood is foreseeable, but it still shocks when the water rushes over the edge. That's how it is with the hounds that descend upon a woman in the 1992 novel "Black Dogs"; the orgiastic murder in the 1981 novel "The Comfort of Strangers"; the botched sexual initiation in "On Chesil Beach." At moments of peak intensity, McEwan slows time down—a form of torture that readers enjoy despite themselves. In "The Child in Time," from 1987, a man's little girl is kidnapped at the supermarket, and his rising panic is charted with the merciless precision of a cardiogram. In "The Innocent," a 1990 tale of espionage in postwar Berlin, McEwan spends eight pages conjuring a corpse's dismemberment. And "Saturday" keeps the reader jangled for nearly forty pages, wondering along with Perowne if an airplane descending on London has become a terrorist missile. Martin Amis says, "Ian's terribly good at stressed states. There's a bit of Conrad that reminds me of Ian. It's 'Typhoon,' when the captain is heading into this terrible storm and Conrad is in the position of first mate. Going into the captain's cabin, he notices that the ship is yawing so that the captain's shoes are rolling this way and that across the floor, like two puppies playing with each other. You think, Wow, to keep your eyes open when most people would be closing theirs. Ian has that. He's unflinching."



Page-turning excitement has long been a suspect virtue in a literary novel, and some critics have disparaged McEwan as a hack with elegant prose. He does lean on noirish tropes—the climaxes of "Enduring Love" and "Saturday" both involve a deranged man, a trembling woman, and a knife. But McEwan believes that something stirring should happen in a novel. Though he is animated by ideas, he would never plop two characters on a sofa and have them expound rival philosophies. The opening to "Enduring Love" offers a crisp illustration of game theory: when a balloon becomes untethered, each of the five men holding a rope is forced to make a decision without knowing what the others will do. But most readers enjoy it as a thrilling set piece. On our walk, McEwan twice cited Henry James's dictum that the only obligation of a novel "is that it be interesting." Later, McEwan declared that he finds "most novels *incredibly* boring. It's amazing how the form endures. Not being boring is quite a challenge."

It is now a commonplace that McEwan has edged past his peers to become England's national author. The London press pursues McEwan with an avidity otherwise reserved for Amy Winehouse. Shortly after "On Chesil Beach" was published, David Cameron, the leader of the Conservative Party, was photographed reading the novel on the Tube. After McEwan noted, in an interview, that a bookshelf in his study was adorned with some pebbles from Chesil Beach—a protected site—the *Daily Mail* wondered whether this behavior was befitting an exemplar, and McEwan gave them back. In June, McEwan mentioned the subject of the new novel, at a literary festival in Wales. The next day, the *Guardian* front page declared, "CLIMATE CHANGE PLOT FOR MCEWAN NOVEL."

A lawnmower had carved a silvery-green path through McEwan's wildflowers, and we headed toward a hillside planted with wheat. McEwan has papery skin that reddens at the slightest solar provocation, and when the sun suddenly glared forth he trotted back to the cottage to retrieve a wide-brimmed hat. He also turned up the collar of his gray work shirt. Even with this covering, his eyes squinted behind his oval spectacles. His weathered cheeks etched parentheses around his mouth. The knees of his pants had a dusty patina suggesting recent grindings in the dirt. All that was missing was a spade: he looked less like a literary titan than like an older version of Robbie, the gardener in "Atonement."

We ascended the crop field; behind us, solar panels on the roof of McEwan's cottage glistened in the sun. Entering a fern-carpeted wood, McEwan joked that he places his friends along a divide: those who enjoy hiking (Barnes, Michael Frayn) and those who consider it a fatuous premodern practice (Amis, Christopher Hitchens). McEwan relishes the mental restoration that comes from being in nature. "The sensual pleasure of it traps you fiercely in the present," he said. "It has knock-on effects when you go back to work."

Much of McEwan's best writing can be tied directly to a long walk. Ray Dolan, McEwan's most frequent hiking partner, recalled an excursion along the western coast of Ireland. Whipping winds reminded Dolan of a story that he'd read in a foreign newspaper. Somewhere in Europe, a balloon had become unanchored, and a boy was pulled skyward on a rope; he let go and died. (McEwan searched in vain to locate the incident. After "Enduring Love" was published, someone at a reading supplied the answer: Bavaria.) The climactic encounter of "Black Dogs" is a dark echo of a hike that McEwan took in France with his friend Jon Cook, a professor of literature at the University of East Anglia. Cook recalls coming across two dogs as big as ponies: "We felt quite menaced. It was a solitary place, particularly silent—no birdsong—and it felt uncanny, almost supernatural. Afterward, we felt we'd frightened each other as much as anything else." When McEwan was writing "Atonement," he struggled for months with the Dunkirk section. How could Robbie's drama possibly register amid such chaos? He was strolling in Andalusia with McAfee when it came to him: "I realized, It's a hike. I'm not going to write about the Dunkirk evacuation. I'm going to write about Robbie trying to get to the beach."

McEwan's novel-in-progress was inspired by the most magnificent hiking trip he has ever taken, along a frozen fjord in Spitsbergen, a group of Norwegian islands in the Arctic Ocean. He went there in March, 2005, as part of an expedition with Cape Farewell, a British organization concerned about climate change.

"I suspect that we'll soon be kissing our three-Martini lunches goodbye, too."

"Honestly, the hikes were the reason I went," he says, laughing. Accompanied by a guide with a gun, McEwan walked for miles on snow-scabbed ice. "There was a constant danger of polar bears," he recalls. "We saw only tracks, but it was a thrill to think that there was something out there that wanted to eat me." There were twenty-five people on the expedition, all berthed on an icebound ship. Climate scientists mingled with artists, including the British sculptor Antony Gormley.

"The air was the cleanest I've ever breathed," McEwan recalls. "One manifestation of this was the light—the hyperreal clarity of things. It was as if you had twenty-twenty vision, and someone said, 'Here's an extra pair of glasses.' Everything was pinprick sharp." That winter, the ice in Spitsbergen had formed months later than usual, but it was still laceratingly cold. A photograph that Gormley took of McEwan shows him standing atop a plateau of shale shards. Enveloped in a puffy purple snowsuit, McEwan stretches out his arms in a putative gesture of exultation, but he looks more like a desperate explorer, frantically waving for help as the rescue helicopter comes into view.

McEwan knew that global warming was precisely the kind of grand, public-spirited subject that a national author is expected to take on. "Who would be *for* the planet becoming degraded?" he said. "What reader wants to be told what attitude to strike?" Yet the subject tugged at him. Climate change offered a particularly potent source of dread.

In Spitsbergen, McEwan found the catalyst that he needed. He recalls, "On the boat, we were asked to store outer clothing—heavy shoes, splash suits, goggles, balaclavas, gloves—in a boot room. I spent seven years in boarding school, and I took one look and said, 'I'm putting my stuff under my bed.' Within three days, the boot room was chaos. People were losing their stuff, stealing things. Meanwhile, we'd be sitting inside our little ark, with the whole of the planet's population below us, talking about how we were going to save the world. These were motivated, decent, kind people. I thought, Ah. The interesting thing here is human nature. Global warming suddenly wasn't an abstract issue, because humans had to solve it—untrustworthy, venal, sweet, lovely humans."

McEwan was walking slightly ahead of me, amid beech trees. He started work on the new book, as yet untitled, in December, 2007. "On Chesil Beach" is historical fiction, and he likes to alternate between novels set in the past and those set in the present. "Enough time has now gone by since 'Saturday,' " he said. "The present has aged a bit, developed new neuroses."

He foresaw the new novel as having "three acts, thirty thousand words each." (McEwan envisaged "On Chesil Beach" as a forty-thousand-word book; it came in at thirty-nine.) He promised that the novel would not be didactic. "I've given a false impression that it's *about* climate change," he said at one point. "It will just be the background hum of the book." The novel is a character study of the kind of idealist who'd steal somebody else's splash suit. Its protagonist, Michael Beard, is McEwan's third to have a science background—he's a Nobel Prize-winning physicist. ("I like to have them be rational, or at least to like rationalism," McEwan says.) But Beard is far less admirable than Henry Perowne. He has been coasting on his Nobel for twenty years, and he's screwed up several marriages. "He's much dodgier," McEwan said. "He's an intellectual thief. He's sexually predatory. He's a compulsive eater, a round and tubby fellow who has profound self-belief. He has this weird boldness in asking women out to dinner. Able to take a slap on the face and say, 'Better luck next time.' " Beard seemed to have crystallized in his mind, but he wasn't sure yet what would happen to him. Some critics have called McEwan's plotting schematic, but he says that his characters lead the way: "What happens to people is so much a function of who they are."

It had taken months, McEwan said, to establish the "tone of the implied narrator. I feel comfortable now with a certain ironical voice." He added, "The difficulty is, when you have a character like this, you don't want to disgust the reader. It's written in free indirect style, so you travel closely to his thoughts."

Beard, whose specialty is the physics of light, makes a discovery that might help save the planet. "He's definitely hit on something," McEwan said. "The question is whether his personality is going to get in the way—which, in a sense, is our shared problem." He was thinking of embroiling Beard in a public scandal. "It isn't angels necessarily who are going to save us," he said. "Michael Beard is rackety, quarrelsome, competitive, greedy, ambitious, politicking. But, somehow, behind all this there could be some goodness."

The book's first act, which focusses on Beard's personal life, was nearly complete. At the literary festival in Wales, McEwan had read a comic excerpt in which Beard boards a train with a bag of potato chips. He is incensed when his seat mate opens the package and starts eating. ("One of those guys in their mid-thirties with a shaved head and a gym-thickened neck," McEwan told me. "Millions of them in Britain.") Beard notices that the man has a bottle of water and retaliates by grabbing it and taking a sip. Upon disembarking, McEwan said, "Beard puts his hand in his pocket and his package of crisps is in there, untouched."

After McEwan finished his reading, an audience member observed that a similar riff had appeared in Douglas Adams's "The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy" series. The next day, the British press halfheartedly raised the question of plagiarism—a pale retread of a furor two years ago, when the *Mail on Sunday* revealed that several phrases in "Atonement" resembled medical descriptions in a nurse's wartime memoir. (McEwan had thanked the nurse in his acknowledgments.) McEwan claimed to be unfazed by the Wales incident. The chips story, he said, was an urban legend dating to the nineteen-twenties. "The scene is partially about what happens if you have an experience, and then you're told it's an urban legend. Your life is suddenly rendered inauthentic. Now, one of Beard's friends can say, 'But I read that in a Douglas Adams novel!' So it's even better."

Some of the later portions of McEwan's novel will delve into Beard's profession. In preparation, McEwan was reading up on "oil and solar technologies." He was thinking of visiting solar-panel installations in New Mexico and Spain. The Spanish site, he said, was a "beauty": "It's an enormous tower with huge mirrors focussed on its top. That's the gathering point for all the heat. So you have a spire with a glowing orb." Field research was necessary, he told me, whenever his characters had complex jobs. "It's worth knowing about ten times as much as you ever use, so you can move freely," he said.

McEwan had sifted through alternative-energy technologies and concluded that "artificial photosynthesis" was the most promising arena for Beard's potential breakthrough. "Leaves are basically solar panels converting photons to create new chemical bonds," he told me. "Some of the best-endowed labs in the world are trying to replicate what your humble pavement-crack weed does all day." McEwan hoped that the scientists wouldn't take too long. "If current curves hold, in fifty or sixty years' time we will have a Mediterranean-type climate here," he said.

We entered a sunlit glade. McEwan immediately pointed out what was miss-

"Not tonight, hon—I had a yogasm in class."

ing: a profusion of frogs, wildflowers, orchids, dragonflies. He had read a naturalist's account of the Chilterns from the forties, and found it depressing. He said, "In the past, in late June, on these beds of nettles here you would see clouds of butterflies. I see not a one."

His eyes suddenly widened. "A cabbage white!" he said, pointing. "O.K., then. One."

Fitzroy Square, a few streets west of Bloomsbury, is the kind of imperious London address that is studded with plaques naming illustrious former residents: Virginia Woolf once lived there, as did George Bernard Shaw ("From the Coffers of His Genius He Enriched the World"). Completed in 1835, the square is bordered by four-story mansions, painted along the spectrum between cream and white. A circular central garden is sequestered by an iron gate bearing the announcement "PRIVATE GARDEN / RESIDENTS ONLY." Outside the garden, pressed gravel, newly restored by Polish laborers, adds a menacing crunch to one's footsteps. McEwan's house, which he bought in 2002, does not yet have its own plaque.

Fitzroy Square is where Henry Perowne and his wife, Rosalind, live in "Saturday." Neil Kitchen, a brain surgeon whom McEwan shadowed while researching the novel, told me that he'd been a guest at McEwan's house, and had been served the same fish stew that Perowne prepares in "Saturday." (It was delicious.) Alas, a real British neurosurgeon couldn't afford to live in Fitzroy Square. "I live in a smaller house in Islington," Kitchen said. "I ride a collapsible bike to work. I don't have a big Mercedes." Perowne combines the fine motor skills of Kitchen with the granular self-consciousness of McEwan. (Perowne, a "habitual observer of his own moods," is given to reveries about his mental processes which suggest William James and Henry James rolled into one: "His eyes are wide open in the dark; the exertion, his minimally raised blood pressure, is causing local excitement on his retina, so that ghostly swarms of purple and iridescent green are migrating across his view of a boundless steppe, then rolling in on themselves to become bolts of cloth, swathes of swagged velvet, drawing back like theatre curtains on new scenes, new thoughts.") Kitchen said that McEwan's descriptions of operations were "extremely accurate," requiring almost no corrections. Many medical students find brain surgery hard to watch, but McEwan never winced: "He sat in the corner, with his notebook and pencil." Kitchen loved "Saturday," but didn't see much of himself in Perowne; though he is a man of science, he would never look at nurses crossing a square and think of them as "hot little biological engines with bipedal skills."

During his apprenticeship, McEwan played one of his scientific games. "One day, Neil was operating on an aneurysm," he said. "I was all scrubbed up, and two sixth-year students came in. They said, 'Doctor, what's going on in this procedure?' I took them over to the light box and explained the route Neil was taking. They were very respectful."

On the first of several visits to Fitzroy Square, McEwan greeted me at the door in a state of genial distraction. He was throwing a party that evening—it was June 20th, the day before his sixtieth birthday—and, like Clarissa Dalloway, he needed to run some errands in the West End. McEwan took me downstairs into the kitchen to prepare coffee. The house has so many floors that each domestic act necessitates a stair climb. There are two sitting rooms, two studies, two libraries, and a room for watching movies. When I read "Saturday," I was surprised that a pre-dawn trip that Perowne takes from his kitchen to his bedroom made him alert enough for a bout of lovemaking; the daunting staircase expelled my doubts.

Walking upstairs with our mugs, we passed McAfee. They married in 1997; it was the second marriage for both. They met when she profiled him for the *Financial Times;* their "very first words" to each other are still preserved on tape, he says. The marriage is, by all accounts, tranquil: they like to cook and listen to chamber music at Wigmore Hall, which is in walking distance. McAfee, who is fifty-six, has light-brown hair, green eyes, and a composed wit. She later told me that she was "scientifically illiterate," adding, "I've forced myself to work up to a certain level to be able to participate in family conversation." She said that she often felt outnumbered by McEwan and her stepson William, a twenty-five-year-old graduate student in genetics at the University of Glasgow. McAfee told me that William's research focussed on "these lions who have the AIDS virus but no symptoms. He apparently gets sent a lot of lion blood in the post."

McEwan led me into the ground-floor sitting room and sat on a brown leather sofa. Mirror-image Bridget Riley prints, just like the ones in Perowne's house, framed the mantel. On a lacquered side table, a collection of liquor bottles propped up an unframed eight-by-ten photograph: McEwan, Hitchens, and Amis, their arms thrown around one another. The picture was taken in 2004, McEwan said, during what the men call "the Refulgencia"—an extended reunion in Uruguay, where Amis was living at the time. Hitchens recalls that the location held special appeal for McEwan: "We met on this part of the coast near José Ignacio, where the Beagle, Darwin's ship, had put in. We went to see where he put ashore and took samples."

In the seventies, Amis presided over the "Friday lunch," a weekly gathering at a restaurant in Bloomsbury. McEwan and Hitchens were among the regulars. Fuelled by alcohol, the men peacocked for hours, competitively spinning variants on clichés such as "cruising for a bruising." (Amis: "Angling for a mangling." Hitchens: "Aiming for a maiming.") The talk was often lewd. Amis later told me that McEwan was "more evolved" than the others. "There was a higher standard around Ian about being empathetic. You could have disgusting conversations with other friends. That wasn't Ian's style. He wanted to talk intimately, but not the sort of 'Come on, darling, you know you love it' chat that I'm definitely capable of."

Adjoining the sitting room is McEwan's poetry library. His friendship with Amis, he told me, was forged, in part, by a shared love of verse: "We would sit around in the seventies, drink a bit, get a bit stoned, and talk about poetry. Larkin came up a lot. Stuff by friends—Craig Raine, James Fenton. Sometimes Shakespeare. Pulling books off shelves and just *tasting* things." As for prose, both men had a strong affection for writers living in America—Nabokov, Roth, Bellow, Updike—and a contempt for what McEwan calls the "overstuffed, overfurnished English novel."

Amis told me that McEwan and he,

for all their affinities, have little in common as prose stylists. "I am more surface and he is more undercurrent," Amis said. "I am very caught up with how words sound and he smooths it out more. He's more interested than I have ever been in very subtle gradations." McEwan, when told this, said, "I'm less expansive and musically *performative* than Martin, but in terms of the pulse of a sentence I care as much as anyone. I like Bach more than I like Wagner, chamber music more than orchestral music. I like a certain kind of terseness into which the occasional image will shine brighter. Style is an extension of personality."

He went on, "When I'm writing, I don't really think about themes." Instead, he keeps in mind a phrase of Nabokov's: "fondle details." McEwan explained, "Writing is a bottom-up process, to borrow a term from the cognitive world. One thing that's missing from the discussion of literature in the academy is the pleasure principle. Not only the pleasure of the reader but also of the writer. Writing is a self-pleasuring act."

He spoke of a passage that he was still polishing, in which Michael Beard reunites with a lover whom he hasn't seen in months. McEwan said that Beard reflects "on what a wealth of sensual data he's forgotten—on how much of her had emptied out of his mind. Although he has thought about her, he's forgotten the feel of her body, the springiness of her fingers, the particular smell of her scalp, which he likes." Beard concludes that this is "one of the pleasures that our feeble memory affords." McEwan said, "These little asides are one of the writer's great pleasures. You write a dialogue passage, and you're allowed to write in a commentary—squeeze in a generalization—between statements made only seconds apart."

Greg, McEwan's younger son, entered the sitting room in a bright-blue bathrobe. He had spiky black hair and his father's slitted eyes. McEwan chatted briefly with him about Argentina—in two days, Greg was beginning a semester abroad. Now twenty-two and a graduate student in international relations at the University of London, Greg was a source for Theo, Perowne's guitarist son in "Saturday." Greg later told me that he had a persistent virus that kept him at home, "under observation," when his father was writing the novel. Though he had Theo's loping grace, he noted a key divergence: "I definitely don't wear tight black jeans!" He recalled, "I used to play the guitar a lot, and I think he foresaw me going into music. I used to really like the blues." His father, he noted, plays the flute and is also a blues fan. "He gave me loads of instruction. He taught me my first chords. He'd play Oasis with me." Some reviewers found the father-son relationship in "Saturday" dubiously chummy, but not Greg. "I'm not sure if we've *ever* argued," he said. "He walked us to school and picked us up, yeah. He'd drive us to my friends', and watch out for us when we went to skate parks." His father didn't "close himself off with the work," he said. "I could walk into his study at any time of the day."

The portrayal of familial contentment in "Saturday" was meant as a provocation. "No one ever says, except in conversation, that they're actually enjoying their children, that they might be a source of interest and pleasure," McEwan said. "I thought there was some bad faith in omitting that as a possibility." The book is equally rosy about marriage; Perowne has sex with his wife twice in one day. John Banville, in *The New York Review of Books,* seized upon that detail, writing, "Apparently in the purlieus of north London, or at least in McEwan's fantasy version of them, no one suffers from morning breath, and women long-married wake up every time primed for sex." McEwan says, "The critic was revealing far more about himself and his wife's teeth-flossing habits than anything about the book."

McEwan grew up in a very different kind of household than the one he celebrates in "Saturday." He is from a military family that, he says, had almost no books. "It used to drive me crazy," he recalled. "I'd be reading a book, and I'd go out of the room and come back half an hour later. I'd say, 'Where's my book?' My mother had tidied it away, because the table was polished and it interrupted the view."

He was born in 1948, in Aldershot, southwest of London, but he spent most of his childhood abroad, at military bases. The family's longest posting was in Libya. For a time, they stayed on a peanut farm. His father, David, a career Army officer, worked long hours, and McEwan was often alone with his mother, Rose, a housewife. From the start, he enjoyed contemplating his brain. "The moment in 'Atonement' when Briony is crooking her finger and wondering at which point the intention is actually resolved into a movement is something very much from my childhood," he says.

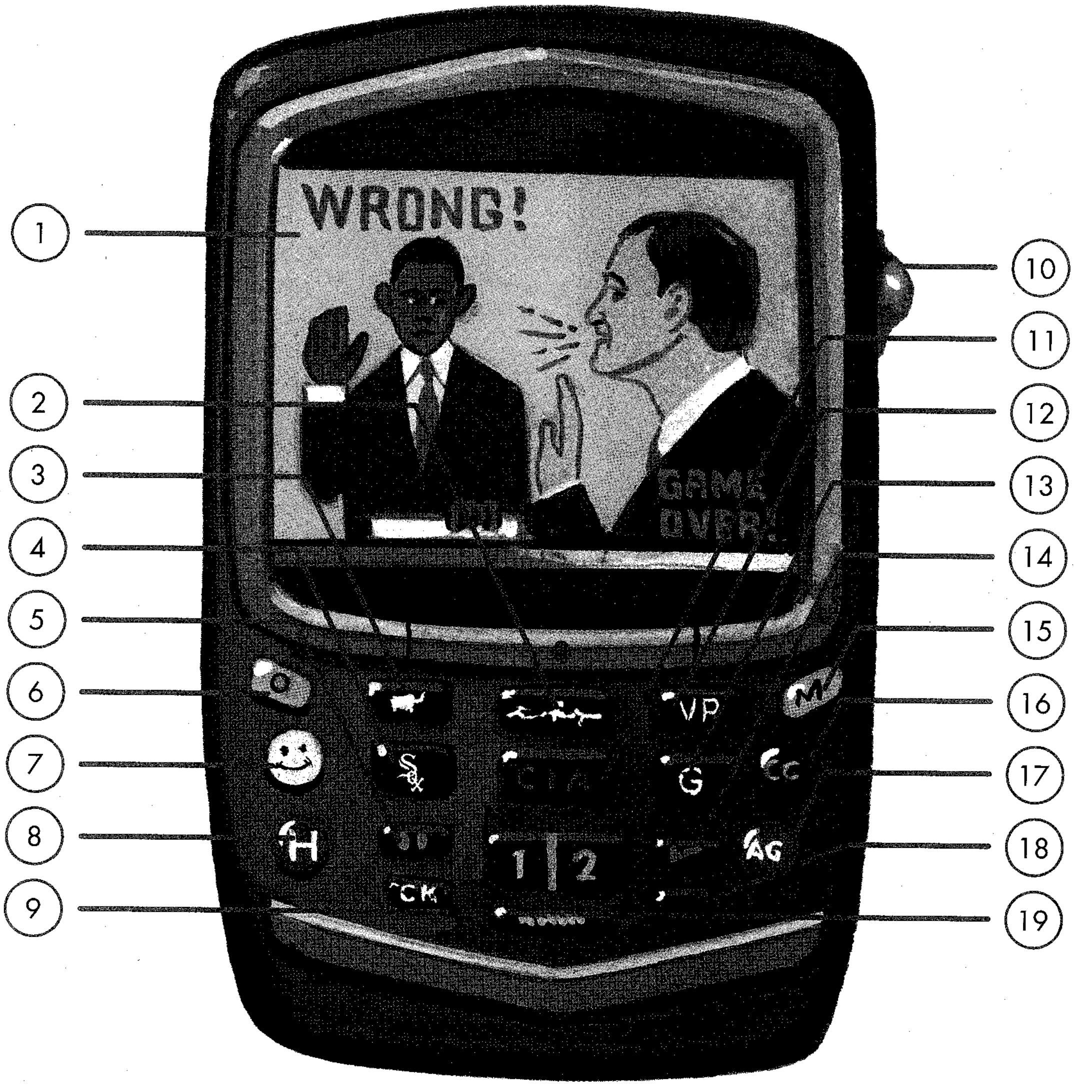
McEwan's mother was on her second marriage. Her first, to a housepainter named Ernest Wort, produced a son, Jim, and a daughter, Margy. Wort served in the Second World War, and died from combat injuries in 1944. Three years later, Rose married David McEwan, who wanted little to do with his stepchildren. Jim was raised by Ernest Wort's mother; Margy was enrolled at a boarding school for soldiers' orphans. As a result, McEwan felt like an only child.

His parents, who both left school at fourteen, had few literary interests, but, he says, "The writer in me is from my mother. She was a great worrier, which requires an imagination. She was always convinced that she left the iron on." In a tender essay, "Mother Tongue," McEwan writes about Rose's intense intellectual anxiety. Ashamed of her working-class accent, she spoke with absurd slowness in front of posh women, treating the English language "as something that might go off in her face, like a letter bomb."

McEwan's father was domineering and temperamental, but he loved Ian fiercely; they hunted for scorpions in the desert with a jam jar, and roughhoused in the Mediterranean. "I used to stand on his shoulders, which were very slippery because the sea would wash his Brylcreem off his hair," he recalls. David McEwan, an acutely intelligent man—he received the highest test scores in his school district before his mother asked him to drop out and start earning a wage—served in the Second World War, and was wounded at Dunkirk; the Army offered to send him to college, but he declined. "He was too cautious," McEwan said. "It used to drive me to despair, his love of doing the same thing each day. Each Saturday, he'd go to the same pub and have a pint of beer while my mother went and did the vegetable shopping. She was to come back half an hour later, and if she took longer he'd start looking at his watch. And she would know that he'd be looking at his watch, so she'd be hurrying—a tightness around the heart. She couldn't bear his disapproval. And then she would have a sherry, and then he would ask her if she wanted another one, and she would say no, and he

SKETCHBOOK BY BRUCE McCALL

OUR PRESIDENT'S NEW BLACKBERRY



1. Oath-of-Office Interactive Memory Game.

2. Press to delete announcements of new Iraq self-government start date.

3. Press to play prerecorded "Love to, but this term's no good" response to Senator McCain lunch request.

4. Tap to get today's White Sox 2009 astrological chart.

5. Push for hourly update on Michelle clothing expenditures.

6. Alarm flashes if Malia and Sasha are jumping on Lincoln's bed.

7. Push to get Rahm Emanuel's Wisecrack of the Day.

8. Push to set automatic "Line no longer in service" response to incoming Hillary calls.

9. Press to activate simulated busy signal on incoming Caroline Kennedy calls.

10. Push to reset automatic cigarette-break reminder buzzer.

11. Tap once to activate C.I.A. briefing. Tap twice to activate C.I.A.-briefing lie detector.

12. Press to activate simulated nuclear alert ten minutes after Vice-President Biden enters Oval Office.

13. Automatic alert beeps if Al Gore is within one mile of White House.

14. Press to divert incoming Bill calls to Hillary's number.

15. Press for Mensa chat line.

16. Mute button for twenty-four-hour live CongressCam.

17. Press for Illinois Attorney General's office Crisis Hot Line.

18. Push once to add another ten billion dollars to bailout plan.

19. Press to refresh current Cabinet roster.

"If you have a better idea for making a talking piano, I'm all ears."

• •

would say, 'Well, I'll have another beer,' and then he would have another beer, and then they would drive home." The marriage was "quite troubled," and there were episodes of domestic violence, McEwan recalled. "There was always a sense of exile and boredom, a lack of ordinariness." He never understood why his parents remained abroad, as they had no zest for travel. From 1961 to 1981, they lived in Germany, watching television each night without understanding a word.

"Mother Tongue," McEwan's attempt to understand his mother's "timorous" life, was published in October, 2001, when she was succumbing to dementia. It's especially moving to read now, because he was only a few months away from a discovery that cast a new light on her clenched unhappiness. In February, 2002, McEwan learned from a family-tracing service that he had an older brother.

Evidently, Rose and David McEwan had begun an affair while Ernest Wort was fighting in Italy. She became pregnant, and in December, 1942, they placed an ad in the Reading *Mercury:* "Wanted, Home for Baby Boy, age 1 month; complete surrender." Two weeks later, Rose and her sister stood on the platform of the Reading train station, and handed the baby off to the first couple that had answered the ad. Afterward, she could not offer her sister an explanation for her act; "I just had to," she repeated. McEwan's father may well have demanded that Rose give up the child. The British Army would likely have dismissed him for committing adultery with another soldier's wife.

McEwan made contact with his brother, Dave Sharp, who lives in Oxfordshire. Sharp told McEwan that he was a "brickie"—a bricklayer—who had been raised by loving parents. They met at a hotel bar near Oxford and soon figured out that they were, as Sharp puts it, "chalk and cheese." An outgoing man who favors broad jokes, Sharp told McEwan that he was a football fan; his brother confessed to little interest. Sharp was surprised when someone waylaid McEwan for an autograph while McEwan was ordering drinks at the bar. Sharp had only just learned of his brother's books. In an essay published in the *Guardian,* McEwan writes that they soon found common ground "that could not be accounted for by experience alone: an aversion to tobacco, a tendency to develop basal cell carcinomas, and the interesting fact that we had stayed at the same hotel in Spain the preceding summer. A gene for hotel preference awaits expression."

Since the meeting, there have been tense moments, especially in 2007, when Sharp told the story of his adoption to a British tabloid without informing McEwan. Last summer, Sharp, with the help of a ghostwriter, published a memoir, "Complete Surrender," and McEwan reluctantly contributed a foreword. "At first, I thought I'd have nothing to do with it," he said. "Then I realized that that would become a story, too, so better to write something." Nevertheless, the brothers have learned to enjoy each other's company. Sharp told me that he had just laid a brick wall outside McEwan's Buckinghamshire cottage. "Ian brought out a sandwich, we got to chatting and mucking around, and he decided to lay a few bricks," Sharp recalled. "Believe me, he will never be as good a bricklayer as me, as long as he has a hole in his rectum! So I wrote, on one of the bricks, 'IAN.' He said, 'What'd you do that for?' I said, 'I don't want to get the blame for *that.*' "

Though McEwan says that he's happy to have found a brother—he likens it to "a Shakespeare comedy"—the discovery entailed a pained "recalibration" of his family history. His parents' life had been tyrannized by a single act. By living abroad, the McEwans had been hiding from their past, and from Rose's first two children, who were seven and five at the time of the accidental pregnancy. McEwan said, "In a slow-drip way, it was quite upsetting, because it threw into focus the terrible divide that occurred between the world of my mother's first husband and the world of the second." He recalled that, in 1989, he had interviewed his father about his life. His dad, who died in 1996, spoke freely into a tape recorder about the horrors of Dunkirk. "The story had always been that he had met my mother toward the end of the war," McEwan said. "We'd been going about three hours in the evening, both drinking but not drunk. And I said, 'Tell me about the time you first met Mum,' thinking it was a fairly innocent question. He hit the roof. 'How dare you ask me this question? Turn the damn thing off!' I had hit a very sensitive point. Clearly, he met my mother in 1941, not 1945."

Critics have noted that many Mc-

Ewan novels hinge on a single, transformative event: the balloon, the abduction, Briony's accusation. (In "Black Dogs," in what may be a self-inoculating gesture, McEwan has his narrator tweak the idea: "Turning points are the inventions of storytellers and dramatists, a necessary mechanism when a life is reduced to, traduced by a plot.") Yet the story of his parents conforms to this template. It may be true that some of McEwan's novels are overplotted; it is also true that some lives are overplotted.

His mother plainly felt the loss of her son. When McEwan was seven, she told him that he was about to have a new brother. The McEwans had petitioned to adopt a child. Rose even told McEwan his brother's name—Bernard—and said that he would arrive as Ian's Christmas present. But, at the last moment, the adoption agency told the McEwans that a life of foreign postings was unstable. McEwan now wonders if the agency had learned of the trail of abandoned children. In 1982, he wrote an essay about his anticipatory fantasies concerning Bernard—his first fictional character. After learning that Bernard wasn't coming after all, he writes, "I adopted him as an invisible playmate."

The act of giving away one child, McEwan believes, set in motion a perverse pattern. When Ian was eleven, his parents enrolled him at an English boarding school. "I was sent away," he said. "David was given away at a railway station. My half brother and half sister were sent away. Not till my brother appeared did all that come into focus."

McEwan recalls sobbing as he boarded the plane from Libya to England, but the experience allowed him to reinvent himself. Woolverstone Hall, in Suffolk, was an experimental school for bright but disadvantaged children. McEwan was a timid pupil but a voracious reader. Initially, he preferred Agatha Christie mysteries and "slightly superior blockbusters," such as "The Cain Mutiny," but he soon graduated to Graham Greene and Iris Murdoch. Embarrassed by the same speech patterns that had burdened his mother, he enlisted a friend to correct him when he said things like "I done it." His shyness concealed a bold mind. In 1965, in the school magazine, McEwan published a darkly comic poem commemorating the recent decision in Britain to outlaw capital punishment. McEwan describes a convicted murderer who is eagerly awaiting his death, to be "spared the blank years / of prison and more bitter tears." Then comes the twist: "But didn't you know hanging is banned? / We've put in your hour-glass plenty of sand. / You spend your life in a solitary cell, / But never you mind, we only wished well."

McEwan enjoyed studying calculus—"It was like trying to lift a weight that was a little too heavy"—but he settled on literature, and showed enough promise that he was urged to apply for a scholarship at Cambridge. During the interview, McEwan's intellectual anxiety came to a head: "Three dons sat down and talked to me about tragedy. They asked me about Aristotle's views on this, and I was able to tell them that. Then we talked about 'Julius Caesar,' 'Othello.' Then 'Macbeth.' I hadn't read 'Macbeth.' I knew the story, and so I passed over it lightly, and said, 'On the other hand, in "Coriolanus"...' Then one of them said, 'Mr. McEwan, can we get back to "Macbeth"?' And I began to flounder. Then another one said, 'Mr. McEwan, have you *read* "Macbeth"?' And I said no. I was crippled by this, and refused to answer any more questions. I was just so humiliated." He did not get the scholarship, and after a gap year in London, where he worked part time as a trash collector, he enrolled at the University of Sussex.

He arrived in 1967, and by his final year had developed two new passions: reading Freud and writing fiction. Upon graduating, he enrolled in a master's program in comparative literature, at the University of East Anglia, which allowed him to submit stories as part of his degree. From the beginning, his prose had an unnerving discipline. Descriptions were precise; there was no failed wordplay or tortured metaphors; sentences had a razored gleam. ("I saw my first corpse on Thursday," one story began. "Today it was Sunday and there was nothing to do.") In "Mother Tongue," McEwan explains that his surgical prose was, in part, a product of class anxiety. He composed words "without a pen in my hand, framing a sentence in my mind, often losing the beginning as I reached the end, and only when the thing was secure and complete would I set it down. I would stare at it suspiciously. Did it really say what I meant? Did it contain an error or an ambiguity that I could not see? Was it making a fool of me?"

McEwan's sentences were hypercontrolled, but his themes were lurid. "Butterflies" nestles inside the mind of a pedophile as he molests a young girl, then tosses her into a canal. "In Between the Sheets" captures a father's attempts to repress a sexual attraction for his daughter. Incest also dominates his first novel, "The Cement Garden" (1978), a grim fantasy of abandonment, in which teen-agers become unmoored after their parents die. When Jack, the fifteen-year-old narrator, observes his dying mother, he notes that "her eyes, set in dark skin wrinkled like a peach stone, were sunk so far into her skull she seemed to stare out from a deep well." Later, Jack becomes sexually involved with his older sister; the Oedipal foundation of this act is signalled when he touches her nipple, which is "hard and wrinkled like a peach stone." The poet Craig Raine, a longtime friend, cites this repeated image as an example of McEwan's "tremendous sense of form."

When McEwan was twenty-four, Theodore Solotaroff, the editor of the influential *American Review*, accepted "Disguises," a story about an orphan whose aunt forces him to cross-dress. "I remember opening the post," McEwan says. "The issue was shocking pink. On the cover were these names: Susan Sontag, Philip Roth, Ian McEwan. That was extraordinary." Renown soon followed. V. S. Pritchett hailed McEwan as an heir to Beckett and Kafka; a reviewer in *Encounter* called McEwan's prose "constitutionally incapable of being appalled." McEwan's audacity especially attracted young readers. James Fenton, another longtime friend of McEwan's, recalls, "If you were young, reading a book, in love with a girl, and unhappy about it, you were probably reading an Ian McEwan story."

McEwan soon became friendly with Roth, who was living in London at the time. (In a published diary entry, McEwan writes of Roth, "The intelligence is warm, with a touch of cruelty to keep you alert.") "Portnoy's Complaint" was a clear influence on McEwan, whose début collection, "First Love, Last Rites," begins with a tale of a boy so intent on losing his virginity that he settles on his sister. "I took from Roth some sexual devil-may-care," McEwan says. "I gave him 'The Cement Garden' in typescript. He phoned and said, 'We've got to talk.' He came around to my flat, and he spread it all out on the floor. He was really passionate. I was flattered—Philip, by that time, was colossal. He said, 'The first half is great, but once the parents die all hell has got to break loose.' And I said, 'I can see that it would be a better novel than my novel. But it would be a novel by Philip Roth.' "

McEwan developed a notorious public persona. The jacket copy for a paperback edition of his second story collection, "In Between the Sheets," declared, "Nobody ever said he was nice. Nasty, yes. Erotic, prophetic, even at times delicious; inventive, lewd, insolent and lyrical, to be sure; always grimly fantastic; but nice, never." Much has been made of the diminishing ferocity of his work—if "In Between the Sheets" is a wolf, "Saturday" is a lamb—and devotees of McEwan's early fiction often regard him with the same pity that music fans have for rock stars who turn to symphonies in their dotage.

McEwan told me that he was "trying to shock" with his early experiments; there was a tone of disavowal. "I began to feel that I had written myself into a corner," he said. "As I got older, the rather reckless pessimism of my early fiction deserted me." In fact, the change in his work is not as extreme as it may seem. McEwan's presiding interest has always been psychology, and, like many scientists of his generation, he has shifted his intellectual allegiances. At first, he studied perversity; now he studies normality. His first god was Freud. Now it is Darwin.

CROWNING

Now that knowing means nothing,
now that you are more born
than being, more awake
than awaited, since I've seen
your hair deep inside mother,
a glimpse, grass in late
winter, early spring, watching
your mother's pursed, throbbing,
purpled power, her pushing
you for one whole hour, two,
almost three, almost out,
maybe never, animal smell
and peat, breath and sweat
and mulch-matter, and at once
you descend, or drive, are driven
by mother's body, by her will
and brilliance, by bowel,
by wanting and your hair
peering as if it could see, and I saw

One evening in September, McEwan met me at L'Étoile, a bistro on Charlotte Street, just south of Fitzroy Square. In Saul Bellow's "The Dean's December," the title character dines at the restaurant, and muses that "he could live happily ever after on Charlotte Street." In "Saturday," Henry Perowne recalls the line while driving through the neighborhood but can't remember the novelist.

McEwan often has dinner at L'Étoile, and we were seated by the front window. The walls were covered with signed photographs of London celebrities, one of which was a recent acquisition: the snapshot of McEwan, Amis, and Hitchens that had perched on McEwan's liquor table. (At the restaurant's request, McEwan had donated the photograph.) In this public setting, the intimate picture had the outlaw air of a "Wanted" poster; for months, the London press had been criticizing the trio's political stance on Islam. A commentator for the *Independent* had called them the "clash-of-civilisations literary brigade."

Amis had taken the most flak, after declaring in an interview, "There's a definite urge—don't you have it?—to say, 'The Muslim community will have to suffer until it gets its house in order.' " McEwan then weathered his own "press storm," as he called it, for coming to Amis's defense. McEwan told *Corriere della Sera* that Amis's target had been radicals, not all Muslims, and said, "I myself despise Islamism, because it wants to create a society that I detest, based on religious belief, on a text, on lack of freedom for women, intolerance towards homosexuality and so on." The *Independent* ran an article on McEwan's remarks, calling them an "astonishingly strong attack." He was dumbfounded. "I'm just criticizing illiberality," he said. He posted a message on his Web site, making clear that "Islamism" meant "extremism." The incident rattled him. "Look at the Islamist Web sites," he told me. "They want me dead. I can't see why the *Independent* did this."

McEwan first confronted Islamism in 1989, when the fatwa against Salman Rushdie was declared. McEwan had access to a cottage in the Cotswolds, and Rushdie secretly stayed with him there. "I'll never forget—the next morning we got up early," McEwan said. "He had to move on. Terrible time for him. We stood at the kitchen counter making toast and coffee, listening to the eight-o'clock BBC News. He was standing right by my side and he was the lead item on the news. Hezbollah had put its sagacity and weight behind the project to kill him. I was close to tears, but I didn't want him to see."

McEwan prides himself on his politeness, but he can't repress a sneer when he speaks of religion. One afternoon at Fitzroy Square, he declared, "The idea of an afterlife, that we'll meet again in some . . . *theme park*? There seems no good reason to think so." In an essay on "apocalyptic beliefs," he writes, "It is not for nothing that one of the symptoms in a developing psychosis, noted and described by psychiatrists, is 'religiosity.' " On another occasion, McEwan, speaking of 9/11, told me, "Faith is at best morally neutral, and at worst a vile mental distortion. Our habits are to respect people of faith, but I think we've been forced to question those habits. The powers of sweet reason

you storming forth,
taproot, your cap of hair half
in, half out, and wait, hold
it there, the doctors say, and
she squeezing my hand, her face
full of fire, then groaning your face
out like a flower, blood-bloom,
crocussed into air, shoulders
and the long cord still rooting
you to each other, to the other
world, into this afterlife
among us living, the cord
I cut like an iris, pulsing,
then you wet against mother's chest
still purple, not blue, not yet
red, no cry,
warming now, now opening
your eyes midnight
blue in the blue-black dawn.

—*Kevin Young*

look a lot more attractive post-9/11 than the beckonings of faith, and I no longer put them on equal scales."

According to Hitchens, McEwan's hostility to irrational thinking has "something of the zeal of the convert." He recalls that McEwan was once on the other side of the divide: "He was teasable as someone who had this slightly mystical view of things. He didn't believe that the material substrata was the be-all and end-all." He went on, "Ian has gone from someone who was a little bit promiscuous and flirtatious when it came to Gaia—slightly over-awed impressions of the numinous—to someone who has, very sternly and brilliantly, committed himself to the integrities of objectivity, evidence, reason, and investigation." Timothy Garton Ash, the Oxford historian, says, "Ian lived the sixties, with all their fascination with alternatives of various kinds. There's absolutely no question that this was a personal journey."

In 1972, McEwan and two friends bought a used microbus and drove from Munich to the Khyber Pass. "Ian was more of a hippie than I was," Amis says. "I was an opportunistic hippie—more velvet suits and flowered shirts. He was more . . . '*Afghanistan*, yeah.' He had several caftans, you know. And beads, I think. A bit of that." (McEwan denies ever owning a caftan, but a diary entry from 1976 is instructive: "We eat *Psilocybe* mushrooms, canoe, swim naked in the electric-cold water, take saunas, play volleyball, drink wine and talk about Jimmy Carter, and Ezra Pound.")

In the mid-seventies, McEwan fell in love with Penny Allen, whom he had met at East Anglia. She was divorced and had two daughters, Polly and Alice. James Grant, a philosopher who was friends with them both, describes Allen as "quite prominent in the feminist movement" and an "intelligent student of literature. She would read his stuff and talk seriously about it." Allen admired the poet Adrienne Rich. McEwan's epigraph to "The Comfort of Strangers" quotes Rich's verse: "How we dwelt in two worlds / the daughters and the mothers / in the kingdom of the sons." Martin Amis said that McEwan was attracted to Allen's ideological stance: "Ian was saying things in the mid-seventies like the immediate future of the novel was to deal with the emancipation of women." Allen wrote fiction herself, but she did not find success. She was also fascinated with astrology and spirituality, and eventually began teaching a class called "Meditation, Healing, Astrology, and Creativity."

McEwan struggled to find scientific grounding for such alternative beliefs. In the late seventies, he read "The Dancing Wu Li Masters," a book, by Gary Zukav, that draws tendentious connections between quantum mechanics and Eastern mysticism. McEwan recalls, "I thought that perhaps I'd found a consilience of Eastern and Western thought." He wrote an essay that, citing Zukav, celebrates "the new physics": science "has perhaps reached a point where it might no longer be at odds with that deep intuitive sense—which seems to have always been with us—that there is a spiritual dimension to our existence, that there is a level of consciousness within us at which a transcendent unity may be perceived." The essay applauds "the great resurgence of interest in mysticism, eastern philosophies, ancient forms of divination and healing," and "forms of healing that lie outside the mechanistic approach of conventional medicine."

McEwan resists his friends' notion that he has fundamentally changed. "I was *always* interested in science," he says. "I explored mysticism as much as I could, but it never added up for me."

In 1979, McEwan bought a house in Clapham, in South London. McEwan and Allen married three years later, and she and her daughters moved into the house. In 1984, after their son William was born, the McEwans left London for a larger house in Oxford. McEwan was immediately embraced by a literary crowd that included Craig Raine and James Fenton. Allen was a less natural fit. Redmond O'Hanlon, a travel writer who was part of the circle, recalls an incident at a dinner party: "She declared that on Oxford High Street everyone had these brown auras, which was apparently the pits." O'Hanlon responded incredulously, and, as he recalls it, "Ian said, 'Redsy, you know we all have a weak magnetic field round us.' At that stage, he was defending her." McEwan speaks of Allen with reticence, saying only, "My first wife was very New Age. I tried to accommodate it."

"The Child in Time," published in 1987, hints at a split in McEwan's mind. One character, a theoretical physicist, declares, "Shakespeare would have grasped wave functions, Donne would have understood complementarity and relative time. They would have been excited. What richness!" But the novel also features a curious metaphysical sequence in which the protagonist, a writer named Stephen Lewis, stares in the window of a pub and sees his parents, as young people, discussing an unexpected pregnancy. McEwan said that the moment was meant to be akin to a wormhole: "It was my toe in the water of magical realism. I thought I could do it behind the fig leaf of a rather loose interpretation of quantum mechanics." The scene now has an additional resonance—it's as if McEwan had somehow divined his mother's secret pregnancy.

In 1980, McEwan and Ray Dolan met in London, through mutual friends. They became close, and by the late eighties were taking hikes that lasted for days. Dolan recalls that he and McEwan were trying to "shake off" some "post-hippie junk." They began a sustained study of evolution. "At the end of the eighties, we had very intense conversations around the issue of geology and evolutionary theory, so I think there was clearly a change occurring," Dolan said. They read biographies of Darwin and visited his home in Kent. Independently, they went to a churchyard, in the Malvern Hills, where Darwin's favorite daughter, Annie, was buried at the age of ten. McEwan said, "Annie was heartstoppingly articulate. Most terrible event in Darwin's life. It reinforced his wife's faith and emptied Charles's."

McEwan's 1992 novel "Black Dogs" is about a terrible event that sunders a husband and wife. After June Tremaine escapes an attack by dogs—"spirit hounds, incarnations"—she is left "convinced of the existence of evil and of God." She declares, "Without a revolution of the inner life, however slow, all our big designs are worthless." Her husband, Bernard, a doctrinaire rationalist, cannot abide the "lengthening roll call of June's certainties: unicorns, wood spirits, angels, mediums, self-healing, the collective unconscious, the 'Christ within us.'" McEwan renders their falling out with admirable equipoise. At the novel's end, he offers a lyrical description of June in a meditative trance:

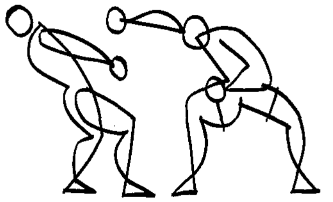
> She was delivered into herself, she was changed. This, now, here. Surely this was what existence strained to be, and so rarely had the chance: to savor itself fully in the present . . . the smooth darkening summer air, the scent of thyme crushed underfoot, her hunger, her slaked thirst, the warm stone she could feel through her shirt, the aftertaste of peach, the stickiness on her hand, her tired legs, her sweaty, sunny, dusty fatigue.

In a 1992 interview, McEwan said, "I've always had a great love of science, and yet I've never been convinced that rational explanations are enough. On the other hand, my spiritual dimension is so out of focus that all I can say is that it is an ill-defined dissatisfaction, a feeling that the material visible world is not either quite all or all that it seems."

Over time, the material world came to seem more than enough. McEwan began exchanging friendly e-mails with Richard Dawkins, the Oxford evolutionary biologist who is an outspoken atheist. Such alliances were inimical to McEwan's wife. Allen began working on a New Age book, "The Face of the Deep: Healing Body and Soul," which declares, "Through our over-concentration on the logical, the conscious and the light of reason, we have endangered the fabric of life." They separated in 1994, and divorced a year later.

They argued over custody, and in 1999 Allen, who was living in Brittany, ran off with Greg, who was then thirteen. Timothy Garton Ash went with McEwan to France to look for his son. McEwan was living the nightmare of "The Child in Time," and the British papers pounced on this coincidence. Garton Ash recalls being in a hotel restaurant with McEwan, and realizing that all the other diners in the room were journalists. "They were absolute snakes," he recalls. "They found out where Greg was before Ian did, but they didn't let on about it, because they wanted to secure an interview first." The French police found Greg bicycling with his mother along a road in Saint-Brieuc, thirty-five miles from Allen's house. McEwan took him back to Oxford. McEwan was given full custody of the boys, and he has remained close with his stepdaughters. A judge barred Allen from speaking publicly about her relationship with McEwan, and said that she was "more governed by her emotions than her intellect."

Galen Strawson, a philosopher who lives in Oxford, said that the breakup freed McEwan to "become radically more scientific than any one of us." McEwan's next novel was "Enduring Love." Whereas in "Black Dogs" the intellectual war is between equals, Joe Rose's logical mind clearly shows up that of his girlfriend, Clarissa. A Romantic scholar, she doubts his evidence that he is being stalked, and nearly ends up dead. McEwan remembers that not every reader accepted the point: "Poor Greg had to study 'Enduring Love' in school. He had a female teacher. And he had to write an essay: Who was the moral center of the book? And I said to Greg, 'Well, I think Clarissa's got everything wrong.' He got a D. The teacher didn't care what I thought. She thought that Joe was too 'male' in his thinking. Well. I mean, I only wrote the damn thing."



As McEwan has grown more outspoken in his rationalism, his books have become fully anchored in old-fashioned realism. "It's enough to try and make some plausible version of what we've got, rather than have characters sprout wings and fly out the window," he says. His few gestures toward the postmodern have been gingerly. Although "Atonement" ultimately makes the reader uncomfortably aware of its status as fiction, McEwan achieves the effect in a manner often associated with Hollywood thrillers. The fact that Robbie's story is a romantic fantasy invented by Briony, the person who betrayed him, is presented as a twist ending.

More than anything, the structure of "Atonement" resembles one of those psychological studies which McEwan so admires. If the reader becomes fully invested in the drama—to the point of resenting the revelation that the story is Briony's invention—then, according to McEwan, the experiment worked. "I'm still often asked, 'What really happened?'" he said. "I don't tire of it, because I think that to ask that question of me means I succeeded in something." He explained, "We can't retreat to the nineteenth century. We now have a narrative self-awareness that we can never escape, but we don't want to be crushed by that, either. 'Atonement' was my attempt to discuss where we stand."

"Saturday" was an even more personal statement—a direct assault on the modern novel's skepticism toward science. There are mathematical equations in "Gravity's Rainbow," but Pynchon suggests that they are almost always used for pernicious, occult ends; in Don DeLillo's "White Noise," technology creates Airborne Toxic Events and pills that induce delusion. "Saturday" presents technology in a far more sanguine light. The book's rapturous descriptions of multiblade razors, car stereos, and digital cameras—which strike some readers as blindly consumerist—suggest Perowne's appreciation of the human ingenuity behind even incremental invention. "Not everything is getting worse," he admonishes. Postmodern novelists have suggested that the contemporary world is an enveloping mystery, a dark chain of conspiracies. For McEwan, though, we live in a widening cone of light—a time of the decoded genome, the Hubble telescope, the illuminated brain. Such glories might best be appreciated by a novelist with an Augustan spirit.

When dusk arrives at the London Zoo, the animals let loose a collective bedtime squawk. And so the conversational hum of the two hundred and thirty guests arriving for McEwan's sixtieth-birthday party was accompanied by a bestial din. The event was held in a ballroom overlooking the zoo's grounds, and by the time some of London's most esteemed writers—Tom Stoppard, Kazuo Ishiguro, Julian Barnes, Edna O'Brien—showed up for the catered dinner the place felt like an aquarium overfilled with tropical fish. McEwan did not want his party to resemble a book launch. Accordingly, the invitation was insistently lowbrow—"OLD MAN AT THE ZOO," accompanied by the image of a gorilla with a raised middle finger—and the evening's entertainment was a thumping blues band.

Most novelists do not have two hundred good friends; McEwan is unusually social. He was on the younger end of his crowd. Michael Frayn, the seventy-five-year-old author of "Copenhagen," spent much of the cocktail hour sitting down. "We stayed at the McEwans' last weekend," he told me. "We had a long talk about philosophy and science, and I was suddenly humiliated, because he knows far more than I do. I felt very much on the back foot." Frayn recently published a book-length essay, "The Human Touch," in which he argues that "the laws of physics and numbers are not entities out there, independent of ourselves." He told me later, "Ian's very much a Socratic talker. But, clearly, from the drift of his questions, he disagrees quite strongly."

"I need something that says, 'Let's party,' but in a fiscally responsible manner."

Three of the guests at the party—Galen Strawson, Craig Raine, and Timothy Garton Ash—get to read his work before publication. (Not Amis, McEwan said: "I don't want a *novelist* reading my work, thank you very much!") In 2001, Garton Ash persuaded McEwan to drop the "An" from the title of his new novel, "An Atonement." In the published version of "On Chesil Beach," there is a hint that Florence's wedding-night fear might be tied to memories of a predatory father. The draft, Garton Ash told me, was "one of the very rare cases in which Ian was saying a bit too much." Garton Ash added, "So much of English literature, specifically, is about the unspoken."

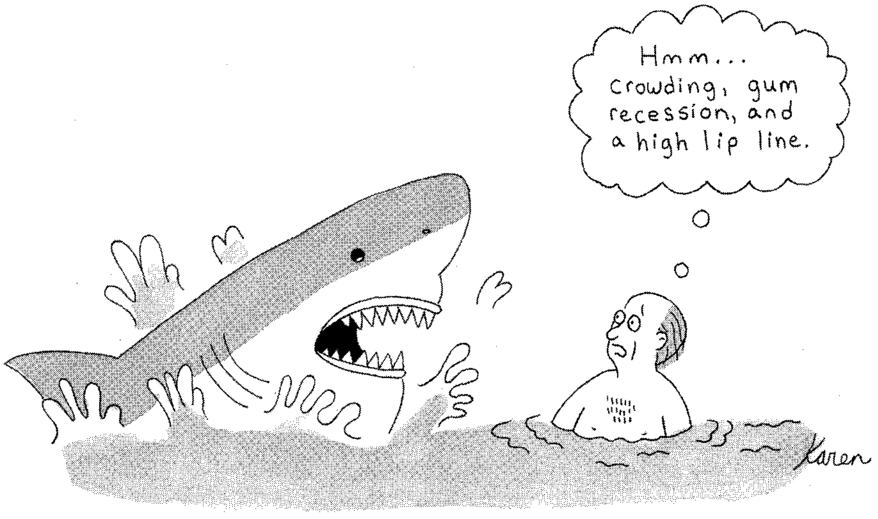
Raine's specialty is lapses in prose. McEwan spoke of an incident with the manuscript of "The Child in Time": "Stephen Lewis visits his friend, and they sit before a flickering log fire, drinking wine. Craig mocked 'flickering log fire' heavily. Much later, I read a piece of Craig's in his book 'Haydn and the Valve Trumpet.' There was a cliché, and I marked it 'F.L.F.': Flickering Log Fire."

McEwan is not always so jovial about criticism. At one point, he asked me if Raine had recounted his savage assessment of "The Comfort of Strangers." They met for lunch, McEwan recalled. "Craig said, 'Listen, love. It's complete crap, and you should put it in a drawer and forget it.' I was furious. And I broke the unspoken rules of engagement. I'd given him the typescript—he wasn't bound to like it. Anyway, I was very offended. He took a while to get forgiven." They didn't speak for nearly two years. (Raine confirmed the incident, but said that his opinion had been rendered decorously.)

McEwan's advisers sometimes disagree. At the party, Strawson and Raine sparred over "Black Dogs." Following Strawson's counsel, McEwan had made changes to a section describing the fall of the Berlin Wall. McEwan had been in Berlin at the time. As Strawson saw it, "Ian had a diary and got slightly too in love with his entries."

"You're so wrong about this!" Raine said. "At first, I felt exactly the same thing. Then I read it again and realized how it all fitted together."

Garton Ash told me that, in McEwan's circle, there was a protocol for discussing one another's new work. "Novelist A calls Novelist B. They talk for three


Hmm... crowding, gum recession, and a high lip line.
Karen

The last moments of Dr. Steven Puckett, D.D.S.

• •

minutes, in which Novelist B talks about the latest political atrocity, about football, about drink. Finally, Novelist A says, 'Why didn't you like my book?' " McEwan agreed that he was sometimes "honest with silence." Asked about intramural competition, he said, "It's there, in the background. But I've always felt that the intellectual space for good writing is infinite. It's not what economists would call a 'positional' good. A good novel does not preclude the possibility of another good novel."

All McEwan's literary friends praise his talent—Craig Raine calls him "the most complete of the novelists that I know"—but they have an odd tendency to dismember his books. Amis, asked to name McEwan's greatest achievement, said, "The first two hundred pages of 'Atonement.' " Fenton cited "the beginning of 'Enduring Love.' " Strawson said bluntly, "Ian is essentially a short-story writer." He said that McEwan's books were often stories "pushed into a novel. I feel that about the losing of the child in the supermarket in 'The Child in Time,' which is brilliant and horrifying. Ian writes best at a length shorter than the full-scale novel; this is connected with his being a master of unease. I've said, 'Write more short stories and novellas. Look at Henry James—they're arguably his greatest legacy.' " Strawson went on, "Ian's novels are very, very accomplished. But none has the unity of drive that the best novels have. 'Atonement' is his best shot."

During dinner, McEwan sat at a large circular table with his family, including Polly and Alice. Around nine o'clock, he stood up. Singing "Happy Birthday," McEwan announced, had been forbidden, since he hates the tune. "Your best achievement in life is your community, your friends, your family," he said. He was wearing a loose-fitting gray suit and no tie. "It's very heartening—delicious—to see you all here. I can face death with a stolid heart, knowing that I have such marvellous friends." Earlier that day, McEwan had said, "When you wake in the morning, you enter that preëxistent state where you're just pure self. You come into full consciousness, and your identity leaps back at you. One of the essential bits of that is where you are in the story. And it's a little disappointing to discover that you're approaching the end."

Amis, who is a year younger than McEwan, joked to Raine, "I'd like to have a Mutton Dressed As Lamb party. Everyone has to come in old clothing, *haunting* their old bodies."

After McEwan's speech ended, the band launched into a riotously loud tribute to Bo Diddley. The party suddenly resembled a wedding—merriment enforced by volume. A few dozen guests fled outside. Raine led the way, wryly lamenting "this pathetic, sentimental notion Ian has that people like live music." Amis, who stayed, smiled and said, "He always does this—deafening, teeth-rattling music. Sorting out the old from the young is what he's doing." For a few numbers, Amis took to the floor, shuffling with the ironical stiffness of someone determined to conceal a lack of rhythm. McEwan, who stripped off his jacket, was more graceful.

Outside, wineglasses rested on the edges of tree planters. Raine noticed a slug crawling up the side of one glass. "It's creepy, like out of one of Ian's early shorts," he said. Zadie Smith walked over, in a nubbly canary-yellow dress, and said, "It must be very good wine."

When the music finally ended, McEwan, sweaty from dancing, chatted with Ray Dolan, who said, "Ian, we sure have got into a lot of craic"—mischief. Once, while hiking in California, they came across a menacing man straight out of a McEwan novel. The man, brandishing a gun, demanded that they "clear the area immediately." Dolan was terrified, but he recalled that McEwan remained "extremely calm and rational," informing the man that he didn't have the authority to tell him what to do, and walking off with Dolan.

An old neighbor from Oxford gave McEwan a hug. "Your sons are so grown up and beautiful!" she said.

"They are all wonderful," McEwan said of his family. "I'm so lucky." He paused, but he couldn't help himself, and paraphrased a line from "Saturday": "It's now the dominant scientific position, you know, that parents have almost no influence."

On a drizzly afternoon in October, McEwan went to Covent Garden and found his way to a basement theatre. He had come to watch a dress rehearsal of "For You," an opera by the British composer Michael Berkeley, for which McEwan had written his first libretto. He sat down next to me, and after several minutes leaned over and whispered, "This is possibly the first moment of penile dysfunction in opera."

Onstage, the baritone Alan Opie—portraying a philandering composer named Charles Frieth—was lying on a chaise longue, groping the increasingly unclothed body of Rachel Nicholls, a soprano playing a much younger French-horn player. The orchestra heightened the sleazy mood with sozzled gestures of atonality. Nicholls suddenly frowned, singing, "They say an erection never lies./But this is also eloquent."

To insure that the audience caught every word, the production featured surtitles. “It was a condition,” McEwan said. “It’s not so distracting. A saccade is all that’s required.”

The libretto offered proof that bourgeois contentment hasn’t vanquished McEwan’s love of the grotesque. “For You” offers a diabolical variation on his 1998 novel “Amsterdam,” a comic parable about a vain composer’s rivalry with his best friend. Charles views his musical talent as a license for misbehavior. (As McEwan told me, his protagonist buys into the myth “that if you’re not a monster you’re no good.”) Charles is nasty to musicians and assistants, and cheats on his ill wife, Antonia. “History will forgive my ways because / My music outstared the sun,” he sings. His Polish maid, Maria, is oblivious of his cruelties, and worships him. Determined to have Charles to herself, she murders Antonia and frames him for the crime. The creepy final tableau suggests that McEwan’s fascination with life imprisonment has not faded since his Woolverstone days: as Charles is led offstage in handcuffs, Maria sings, “I’ll make your cage a happy one. / In the desert of empty time, my visits / will be your sweet oases.” As in “Don Giovanni,” a Lothario ends up in Hell.

McEwan worked on “For You” while completing “On Chesil Beach.” He and Berkeley are old friends; his literary agent is Berkeley’s wife. During intermission, they had dinner in an upstairs cafeteria. Berkeley mentioned that, in the sex scene, the percussionists had used an instrument called a “lion’s roar,” but it had been inaudible. “You pull a string through a drum head, and it makes this odd sound,” he explained. “It needs to be loud, like someone grunting during wild sex.”

The taxonomist in McEwan was delighted: “A lion’s roar! I wished I’d known that when I wrote the libretto.”

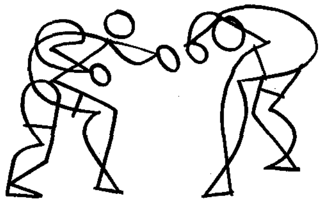
We returned to the theatre for Act II. Antonia lies unconscious in the hospital, recovering from an operation. Maria enters and unplugs her life-support machine. “It’s nice to have an operatic death registered technologically,” McEwan commented. (As Antonia succumbs, Berkeley’s music alludes to the machine’s shrill beeps.) McEwan said that one of his rules for the opera was that it be anchored in psychological realism. “So many are supernatural fairy tales,” he said.

“For You” had its première on October 28th, and received mostly strong reviews. The *Sunday Times* said that McEwan’s text “is manifestly open to the idea of music . . . without foregoing literary appeal.” The production was darkly entertaining, at times verging on camp—less “Don Giovanni” than “Fatal Attraction.” McEwan’s libretto felt like an arch agglomeration of favored motifs: a delusional admirer, a narcissistic artist, a terrible misunderstanding.

It did not surprise me to learn that McEwan keeps a plot book—an A4 spiral notebook filled with scenarios. “They’re just two or three sentences,” he said. One night at Fitzroy Square, after some prodding, he retrieved the notebook from his study and looked at it with me. “Here’s one,” he said. “ ‘A comedy of beliefs set in a laboratory. Into this realm comes a young Islamic scientist who is technically brilliant. The head of the laboratory is a secular humanist, and the two become entangled. Something short and vicious, like Nathanael West.’ ” He paused, abashed. “When you have the bare bones like this, they seem like nothing.” He scanned more pages.

“Actually, here is my current novel,” he said. “I was coming to London in a plane, held in a stack for forty-five minutes. As I waited, I realized that this could be the opening image.” He read from his notes: the city was “rotating beneath him.” A man sees a degraded city below, a “sick sky” approaching night. The panorama, however, fills him with energy: “He couldn’t wait to get home.” It was an inversion of the opening of “Saturday”—an anxious Londoner watching a plane descend in the predawn sky.

McEwan said that he never rushes from notebook to novel. “You’ve got to feel that it’s not just some conceit,” he said. “It’s got to be *inside* you. I’m very cautious about starting anything without letting time go, and feeling it’s got to come out. I’m quite good at not writing. Some people are tied to five hundred words a day, six days a week. I’m a hesitater.”



When McEwan does begin writing, he tries to nudge himself into a state of ecstatic concentration. A passage in “Saturday” describing Perowne in the operating theatre could also serve as McEwan’s testament to his love of sculpting prose:

> For the past two hours he’s been in a dream of absorption that has dissolved all sense of time, and all awareness of the other parts of his life. Even his awareness of his own existence has vanished. He’s been delivered into a pure present, free of the weight of the past or any anxieties about the future. In retrospect, though never at the time, it feels like profound happiness. It’s a little like sex, in that he feels himself in another medium, but it’s less obviously pleasurable, and clearly not sensual. This state of mind brings a contentment he never finds with any passive form of entertainment. Books, cinema, even music can’t bring him to this. . . . This benevolent dissociation seems to require difficulty, prolonged demands on concentration and skills, pressure, problems to be solved, even danger. He feels calm, and spacious, fully qualified to exist. It’s a feeling of clarified emptiness, of deep, muted joy.

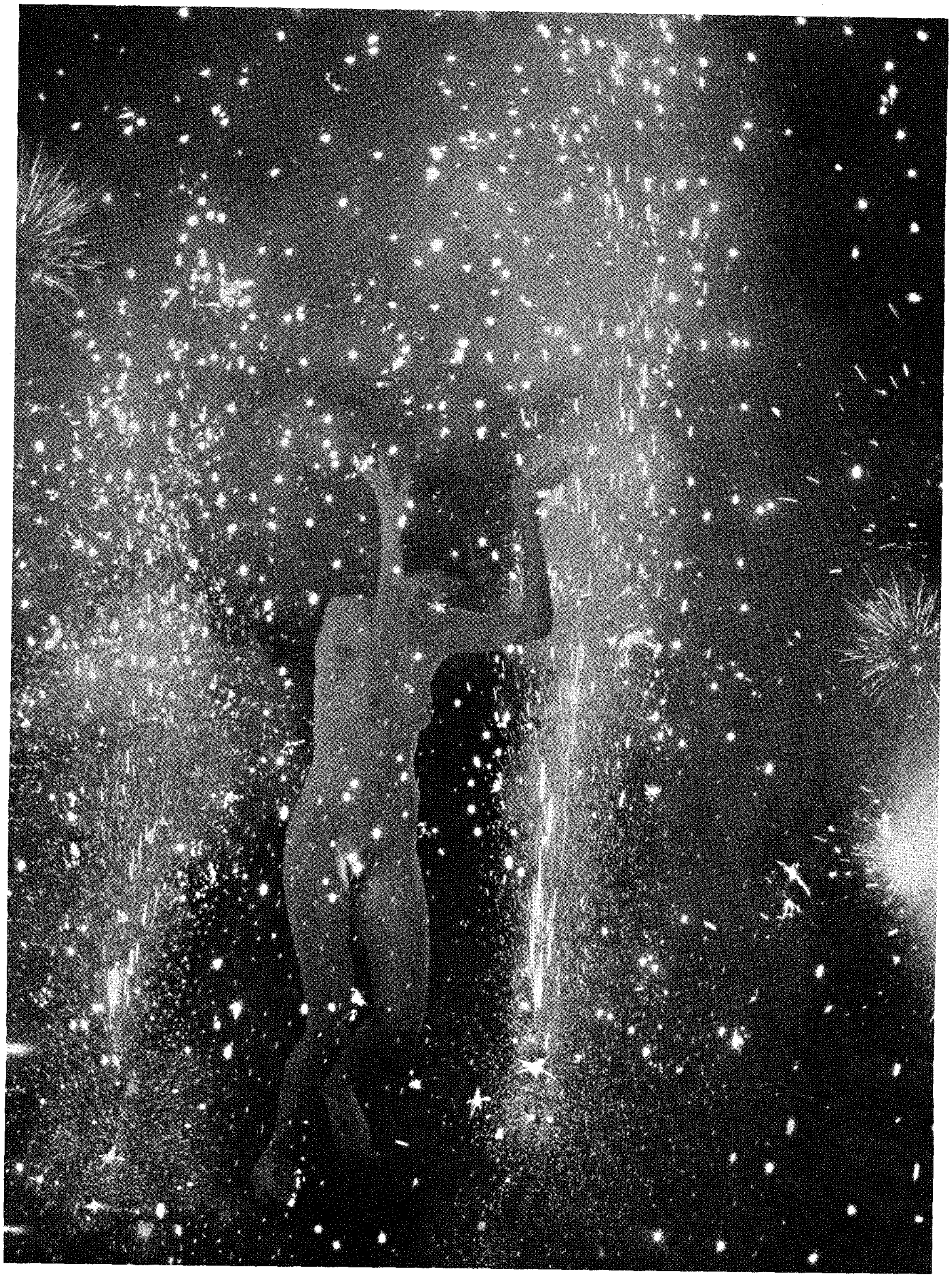
For McEwan, a single “dream of absorption” often yields just a few details worth fondling. Several hundred words is a good day. At one point, we spoke of a line from “The Child in Time.” Stephen Lewis, watching his wife give birth, muses, “This is really all we have got, this increase, this matter of life loving itself.” Such whispers are McEwan at his best. He told me, “You spend the morning, and suddenly there are seven or eight words in a row. They’ve got that twist, a little trip, that delights you. And you hope they will delight someone else. And you could not have foreseen it, that little row. They often come when you’re fiddling around with something that’s already there. You see that by reversing a word order or taking something out, suddenly it tightens into what it was always meant to be.”

For several days, McEwan played with the Heathrow image, and began conjuring his character. He imagined Michael Beard impatiently shifting under his seat belt in the darkening sky. He decided that his protagonist was flying into London from Berlin. But he didn’t want to begin the novel with mere description. From the start, he wanted the “background hum” to catch in the reader’s ear. So McEwan spent a few mornings, and suddenly the words tightened into a row: “He was running out of time. Everyone was, it was the general condition.” ♦

FICTION

THE DAUGHTERS OF THE MOON

BY ITALO CALVINO



Deprived, as it was, of a covering of air to act as a protective shield, the moon found itself exposed right from the start to a continual bombardment of meteorites and to the corrosive action of the sun's rays. According to Thomas Gold, of Cornell University, the rocks on the moon's surface were reduced to powder through constant attrition from meteorite particles. According to Gerard Kuiper, of the University of Chicago, the escape of gases from the moon's magma may have given the satellite a light, porous consistency, like that of a pumice stone.

The moon is old, Qfwfq agreed, pitted with holes, worn out. Rolling naked through the skies, it erodes and loses its flesh like a bone that's been gnawed. This is not the first time that such a thing has happened. I remember moons that were even older and more battered than this one; I've seen loads of these moons, seen them being born and running across the sky and dying out, one punctured by hail from shooting stars, another exploding from all its craters, and yet another oozing drops of topaz-colored sweat that evaporated immediately, then being covered by greenish clouds and reduced to a dried-up, spongy shell.

What happens on the earth when a moon dies is not easy to describe; I'll try to do it by referring to the last instance I can remember. Following a lengthy period of evolution, the earth had more or less reached the point where we are now; in other words, it had entered the phase when cars wear out more quickly than the soles of shoes. Beings that were barely human manufactured and bought and sold things, and cities covered the continents with luminous color. These cities grew in approximately the same places as our cities do now, however different the shape of the continents was. There was even a New York that in some way resembled the New York familiar to all of you, but was much newer, or, rather, more awash with new products, new toothbrushes, a New York with its own Manhattan that stretched out dense with skyscrapers gleaming like the nylon bristles of a brand-new toothbrush.

In this world where every object was thrown away at the slightest sign of breakage or aging, at the first dent or stain, and replaced with a new and perfect substitute, there was just one false note, one shadow: the moon. It wandered through the sky naked, corroded, and gray, more and more alien to the world down here, a hangover from a way of being that was now outdated.

Ancient expressions like "full moon," "half-moon," "last-quarter-moon" continued to be used but were really only figures of speech: how could we call "full" a shape that was all cracks and holes and that always seemed on the point of crashing down on our heads in a shower of rubble? Not to mention when it was a waning moon! It was reduced to a kind of nibbled cheese rind, and it always disappeared before we expected it to. At each new moon, we wondered whether it would ever appear again (were we hoping that it would simply disappear?), and when it did reappear, looking more and more like a comb that had lost its teeth, we averted our eyes with a shudder.

It was a depressing sight. We went out in the crowds, our arms laden with parcels, coming and going from the big department stores that were open day and night, and while we were scanning the neon signs that climbed higher and higher up the skyscrapers and notified us constantly of new products that had been launched, we'd suddenly see it advancing, pale amid those dazzling lights, slow and sick, and we could not get it out of our heads that every new thing, each product that we had just bought, could similarly wear out, deteriorate, fade away, and we would lose our enthusiasm for running around buying things and working like crazy—a loss that was not without consequences for industry and commerce.

That was how we began to consider the problem of what to do with it, this counterproductive satellite. It did not serve any purpose; it was a useless wreck. As it lost weight, it started to incline its orbit toward the earth: it was dangerous, above and beyond anything else. And the nearer it got the more it slowed its course; we could no longer calculate its phases. Even the calendar, the rhythm of the months, had become a mere convention; the moon went forward in fits and starts, as though it were about to collapse.

On these nights of low moon, people of a more unstable temperament began to do weird things. There was always a sleepwalker edging along the parapet of a skyscraper with his arms reaching toward the moon, or a werewolf starting to howl in the middle of Times Square, or a pyromaniac setting fire to the dock warehouses. By now these were common occurrences that no longer attracted the usual crowd of rubberneckers. But when I saw a girl sitting, completely naked, on a bench in Central Park I had to stop.

Even before I saw her I'd had the feeling that something mysterious was about to happen. As I drove through Central Park at the wheel of my convertible, I felt myself bathed in a flickering light, like that of a fluorescent bulb emitting a series of livid, blinking flashes before it turns on fully. The view all around me was like that of a garden that had sunk into a lunar crater. The naked girl sat beside a pond reflecting a slice of moon. I braked. For a second I thought I recognized her. I ran out of the car toward her, but then I froze. I did not know who she was; I just felt that I urgently had to do something for her.

Everything was scattered on the grass around the bench: her clothes, a stocking and shoe here and the others there, her earrings, necklace, and bracelets, purse and shopping bag with the contents spilled out in a wide arc, and countless packages and goods, almost as if the creature had felt herself called on her way back from a lavish shopping spree and had dropped everything, realizing that she had to free herself of all objects and signs that bound her to the earth, and she was now waiting to be assumed into the lunar sphere.

"What's happening?" I stammered. "Can I help you?"

"Help?" she asked, with her eyes staring upward. "Nobody can help. Nobody can do anything." And it was clear that she was talking not about herself but about the moon.

The moon was above us, a convex shape almost crushing us, a ruined roof, studded with holes like a cheese grater. Just at that moment, the animals in the zoo began to growl.

"Is this the end?" I asked mechanically, and I myself didn't even know what I meant.

She replied, "It's the beginning," or something like that. (She spoke almost without opening her lips.)

"What do you mean? It's the beginning of the end, or something else is beginning?"

She got up, walked across the grass. She had long copper-colored hair that came down over her shoulders. She was

RYAN MCGINLEY, "FIREWORKS HYSTERIC" (2007-08)/COURTESY TEAM GALLERY, NY

so vulnerable that I felt the need to protect her in some way, to shield her, and I moved my hands toward her as though to be ready to catch her if she fell or to ward off anything that might harm her. But my hands did not dare even graze her, and always stayed a few centimetres from her skin. And as I followed her, in this way, past the flower gardens, I realized that her movements were similar to mine, that she, too, was trying to protect something fragile, something that might fall and shatter into pieces, and that needed thus to be led toward a place where it could settle gently, something that she could not touch but could only guide with her gestures: the moon.

The moon seemed lost. Having abandoned the course of its orbit, it no longer knew where to go; it let itself be transported like a dry leaf. Sometimes it appeared to be plummeting toward the earth, at others corkscrewing in a spiral movement, and at still others it looked to be just drifting. It was losing height, that was certain: for a second it seemed as if it would crash into the Plaza Hotel, but instead it slid into the corridor between two skyscrapers and disappeared from view in the direction of the Hudson. It reappeared shortly afterward, on the opposite side of the city, popping out from behind a cloud, bathing Harlem and the East River in a chalky light, and, as though caught by a gust of wind, it rolled toward the Bronx.

"There it is!" I shouted. "There—it stopped!"

"It can't stop!" the girl exclaimed, and she ran naked and barefoot over the grass.

"Where are you going? You can't wander around like that! Stop! Hey, I'm talking to you! What's your name?"

She shouted out a name like Diana or Deanna, something that could also have been an invocation. And she disappeared. In order to follow her, I jumped back into my car and began to search the drives of Central Park.

The beams of my headlights lit up hedges, hills, obelisks, but the girl, Diana, was nowhere to be seen. By now I had gone too far: I must have passed her; I turned around to go back the way I'd come. A voice behind me said, "No, it's there, keep going!"

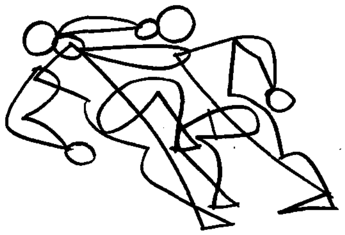
Sitting behind me on the trunk of my car was the naked girl, pointing toward the moon.

I wanted to tell her to get down, to explain that I could not travel across the city with her so prominently on view in that condition, but I did not dare to distract her, intent as she was on not losing sight of the luminous glow that was disappearing and reappearing at the end of the drive. And in any case—and this was even stranger—no passerby seemed to notice this female apparition sitting up on the trunk of my car.

We crossed one of the bridges that link Manhattan to the mainland. Now we were going along a multilane highway, with other cars alongside us, and I kept my eyes staring straight ahead, fearing the laughter and crude comments that the sight of the two of us was no doubt prompting in the cars around us. But when a sedan overtook us I nearly went off the road in surprise: crouched on its roof was a naked girl with her hair blowing in the wind. For a second, I thought that my passenger was leaping from one speeding car to another, but all I had to do was turn my head ever so slightly to see that Diana's knees were still there, level with my nose. And her body was not the only one glowing before my eyes: now I saw girls everywhere, stretched out in the strangest poses, clinging to the radiators, doors, and fenders of the speeding cars, their golden or dark strands of hair contrasting with the pink or dark gleam of their naked skin. There was one of these mysterious female passengers on every car, all leaning forward, urging their drivers to follow the moon.

They had been summoned by the endangered moon: I was certain of that. How many of them were there? More cars carrying lunar girls gathered at every crossroads and junction, converging from all quarters of the city to the place above which the moon seemed to have stopped. At the edge of the city, we found ourselves in front of an automobile scrap yard.

The road petered out in an area with little valleys, ridges, hills, and peaks, but it was not the contours of the land that created the uneven surface but, rather, the layers of things that had been thrown away: everything that the consumerist city had used up and expelled so that it could immediately enjoy the pleasure of handling new things had ended up in this unprepossessing neighborhood.



Over the course of many years, piles of battered fridges, yellowing issues of *Life* magazine, and burnt-out light bulbs had accumulated around an enormous wrecking yard. It was over this jagged, rusty territory that the moon now loomed, and the swaths of crumpled metal swelled as if carried on a high tide. They resembled each other, the decrepit moon and that crust of the earth which had been soldered into an amalgam of wreckage; the mountains of scrap metal formed a chain that closed in on itself like an amphitheatre, whose shape was precisely that of a volcanic crater or a lunar sea. The moon hung over this space, and it was as if the planet and its satellite were acting as mirror images of each other.

Our car engines had all stopped: nothing intimidates cars as much as their own cemeteries. Diana got down, and all the other Dianas followed. But their energy now seemed to fade: they moved with uncertain steps, as though, on finding themselves amid those shards of scrap iron, they were suddenly seized by an awareness of their own nakedness; many of them folded their arms to cover their breasts as if shivering with cold. As they did this, they scattered, climbing over the mountains of useless scrap and down into the amphitheatre, where they found themselves forming a huge circle in the middle. Then they all raised their arms together.

The moon gave a start, as though affected by that gesture of theirs, and it seemed for an instant to recover its energy and to climb again. The circle of girls stood with their arms outstretched and their faces and breasts turned toward the moon. Was that what the moon had asked of them? Did it need them to support it in the sky? I did not have time to ponder this question. At that very moment the crane entered the scene.

The crane had been designed and built by the authorities, who had decided to cleanse the sky of its inelegant encumbrance. It was a bulldozer from which a kind of crab's claw rose up. It came forward on its caterpillar treads, squat and stocky, just like a crab; and when it ar-

LIKE

Woe is blunted not erased
by *like*. Your hands were too full, then

empty. At the grave's

lip, secretly you imagine then
refuse to imagine

a spectre

so like what you watched die, the unique
soul you loved endures a second death.

The dead hate *like*, bitter

when the living with too-small
grief replace them. You dread

loving again, exhausted by the hungers

ineradicable in his presence. *You resist*
strangers until a stranger makes the old hungers

brutally wake. We live by symbolic

substitution. At the grave's lip, what is
but is not is what

returns you to what is not.

—*Frank Bidart*

rived at the place that had been prepared for the operation it seemed to become even more squat, to cling to the earth with all its surface. The winch spun quickly, and the crane raised its arm into the sky; nobody had believed that a crane with such a long arm could be built. Its bucket opened, revealing all its teeth; now, more than a crab's claw, it resembled a shark's mouth. The moon was right there. It wavered as though it wanted to escape, but the crane seemed to be magnetized: as we watched, the moon was vacuumed up, as it were, landing in the crane's jaws, which closed around it with a dry sound—*crack!* For a second, it seemed as if the moon had crumbled like a meringue, but instead it rested there, half in and half out of the jaws of the bucket. It had been flattened into an oblong shape, a kind of thick cigar held between the bucket's teeth. Down came a shower the color of ashes.

The crane now tried to drag the moon down out of its orbit. The winch had started to wind backward: at this point, the winding required a huge effort. Diana and her friends had stayed motionless with their arms raised throughout this process, as though hoping to overcome the enemy's aggression with the strength of their circle. It was only when the ash from the disintegrating moon rained down on their faces and breasts that they began to disperse. Diana let out a sharp cry of lament.

At that point, the imprisoned moon lost what little light it had left: it became a black, shapeless rock. It would have crashed down onto the earth had it not been held back by the bucket's teeth. Down below, the workmen had prepared a metal net, which was fixed to the ground with long nails, all around the space where the crane was slowly lowering its load.

Once it was on the ground, the moon was a pockmarked, sandy boulder, so dull and opaque that it was incredible to think that it had once illuminated the sky with its shining reflection. The jaws of the bucket opened; the bulldozer retreated on its caterpillar treads and almost flipped over as it was suddenly lightened of its load. The workmen were ready with the net: they wrapped it around the moon, trapping it between the net and the ground. The moon struggled in its straitjacket: a tremor like that of an earthquake caused avalanches of empty cans to slide down from the mountain of refuse. Then all was peaceful again. The now moonless sky was drenched with bursts of light from big lamps. But the darkness was already fading, anyway.

Dawn found the car cemetery holding one more wreck: the moon marooned at its center was almost indistinguishable from the other discarded objects; it was the same color, had the same condemned look as something you couldn't imagine ever having been new. A low murmur resounded through the crater of terrestrial trash: the light of dawn revealed a swarm of living things slowly waking up. Hirsute creatures were advancing amid the trucks' disembowelled carcasses, the shattered wheels, the crumpled metal.

Among the discarded things lived a community of discarded people—people who had been marginalized, or who had willingly discarded themselves, people who had tired of racing all over the city to sell and buy new things that were destined to go instantly out of date, people who had decided that the things that had been thrown away were the only real riches of the world. Encircling the moon, throughout the amphitheatre, these lanky figures stood or sat, their faces framed by beards or unkempt hair. It was a tatterdemalion or bizarrely dressed crowd, and in its midst were my naked Diana and all the girls from the night before. They came forward, and began to loosen the steel wires of the net from the nails that had been driven into the ground.

Immediately, like a blimp released from its moorings, the moon rose, hovering above the girls' heads, above the grandstand full of hoboes, and hung there, held by the steel net whose wires

Diana and her friends were operating, sometimes pulling them, sometimes letting them out, and when the girls started to run, still holding the ends of the wires, the moon followed them.

As soon as the moon moved, a kind of wave began to rise from the valleys of wreckage: the old car carcasses crushed like accordions started to march, creakily arranging themselves in a procession, and a stream of battered cans rolled along making a noise like thunder, though you couldn't tell whether they were dragging or being dragged by everything else. Following this moon that had been saved from the scrap heap, all the things and all the people who had been resigned to being tossed in a corner started on the road again, and swarmed toward the richest neighborhoods of the city.

That morning, the city was celebrating Consumer Thanksgiving Day. This feast came around every year, on a day in November, and had been set up to allow shoppers to display their gratitude toward the god Production, who tirelessly satisfied their every desire. The biggest department store in town organized a parade every year: an enormous balloon in the shape of a garishly colored doll was paraded through the main streets, pulled by ribbons that sequin-clad girls held as they marched behind a musical band. That day, the procession was coming down Fifth Avenue: the majorette twirled her baton in the air, the big drums banged, and the balloon giant, representing the Satisfied Customer, flew among the skyscrapers, obediently advancing on leashes held by girls in kepis, tassels, and fringed epaulets, riding spangly motorcycles.

At the same time, another parade was crossing Manhattan. The flaky, moldy moon was also advancing, sailing between the skyscrapers, pulled by the naked girls, and behind it came a line of beat-up cars and skeletons of trucks, amid a silent crowd that was gradually increasing in size. Thousands of people joined the throng that had been following the moon since the early hours of the morning, people of all colors, whole families with children of every age, especially as the procession filed past the crowded black and Puerto Rican areas of Harlem.

The lunar procession zigzagged around uptown, then started down Broadway, and came quickly and silently to converge with the other procession, which was dragging its balloon giant along Fifth Avenue.

At Madison Square, one procession met the other; or, more precisely, the two became a single procession. The Satisfied Customer, perhaps owing to a collision with the moon's jagged surface, deflated into a rubber rag. On the motorcycles now were the Dianas, pulling the moon with multicolored ribbons; or, rather, since the number of naked women had at least doubled, the female motorcyclists must have thrown away their uniforms and kepis. A similar transformation had overtaken the motorcycles and the cars in the parade. You could no longer tell which were the old cars and which were the new: the twisted wheels, the rusty fenders were mixed together with bodywork as shiny as a mirror and paint that gleamed like enamel.

And, behind the parade, shopwindows became covered with cobwebs and mold, skyscrapers' elevators started to creak and groan, advertising posters turned yellow, the egg holders in refrigerators filled with chicks, as if they were incubators, televisions reported whirling atmospheric storms. The city had consumed itself at a stroke: it was a disposable city that now followed the moon on its last voyage.

To the sound of the band drumming on empty gas cans, the procession arrived at the Brooklyn Bridge. Diana raised her majorette's baton; her friends twirled their ribbons in the air. The moon made a last dash, traversed the curved grillework of the bridge, tipped toward the sea, crashed into the water like a brick, and sank, sending thousands of little bubbles to the surface.

Meanwhile, instead of letting the ribbons go, the girls had stayed attached to them, and the moon had lifted them up, sending them flying over the parapet and off the bridge: they described arcs in the air like divers and disappeared into the water.

We stood and stared in astonishment, some of us on the Brooklyn Bridge, others on the jetties on the shore, caught between the urge to dive in after them and the certainty that we would see them reappear again just as before.

We did not have to wait long. The sea began to vibrate with waves that spread out in a circle. At the center of this circle there appeared an island, which grew like a mountain, like a hemisphere, like a globe resting on the water, or, rather, raised up just above it; no, like a moon rising in the sky. I say a moon, even though it did not resemble a moon any more than the one we had seen plunge into the depths a few moments before: however, this new moon had a very different way of being different. It emerged from the sea dripping a trail of green, glistening seaweed; spouts of water gushed in fountains from fields that lent it the sheen of an emerald. A steamy jungle covered it, but not with plants. This covering seemed to be made of peacock feathers, full of eyes and shimmering colors.

This was the landscape that we hardly managed to glimpse before the sphere swiftly receded into the sky, and the more minute details were lost in a general impression of freshness and lushness. It was dusk: the contrasts of the colors were fading into a vibrant chiaroscuro; the lunar fields and woods were now just barely visible contours on the taut surface of the shining globe. But we were able to catch sight of some hammocks hanging from branches, rocked by the wind, and I saw, nestling in them, the girls who had led us to that place. I recognized Diana, at peace at last, fanning herself with a feather punkah, and perhaps sending me a signal of recognition.

"There they are! There she is!" I shouted. We all shouted, and the happiness at having found them again was already fraught with the pain of having lost them now forever, as the moon rising in the dark sky sent out only the reflections of the sun on its lakes and fields.

We were seized by a frenzy: we began to gallop across the continent, through the savannas and forests that had recovered the earth, burying cities and roads, obliterating all trace of what had been. And we trumpeted, lifting up to the sky our trunks and our long, thin tusks, shaking the shaggy hair of our croups with the violent anguish that takes hold of all us young mammoths when we realize that now is when life begins, and yet it is clear that what we desire we shall never have. ♦

(Translated, from the Italian, by Martin McLaughlin.)

Advertisement

REFLECTION

by Bob Staake

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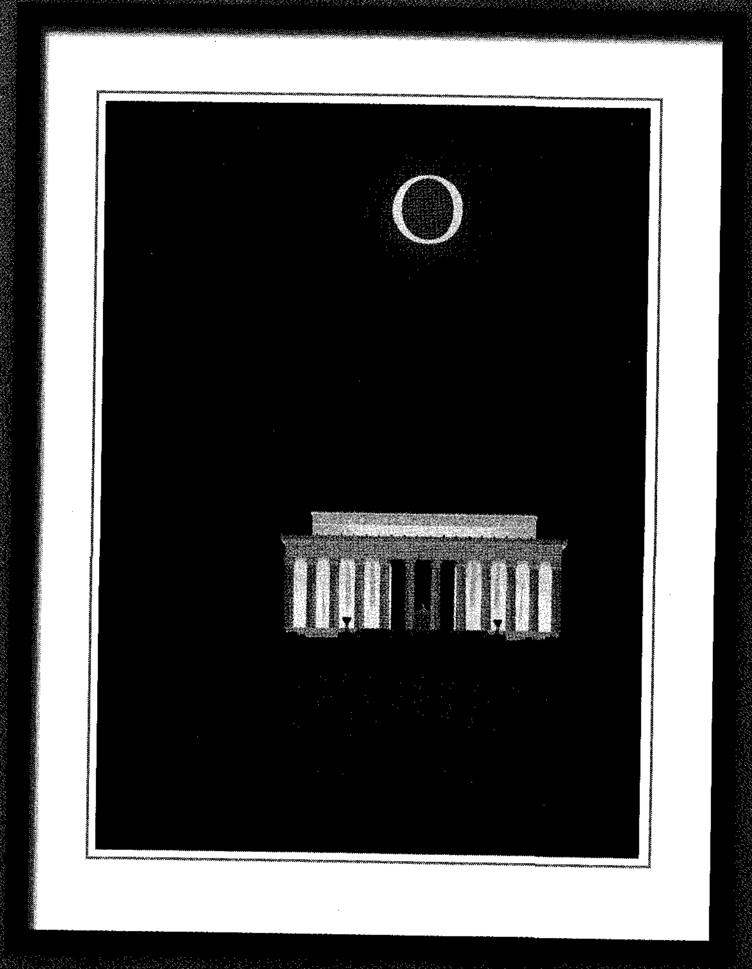

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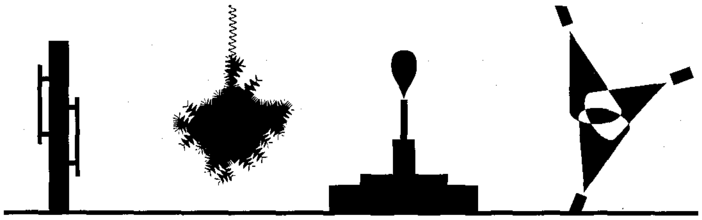
THE CRITICS



A CRITIC AT LARGE

SAVED FROM DROWNING

Barthelme reconsidered.

BY LOUIS MENAND

In the spring of 1983, Donald Barthelme invited about twenty people to dinner at a restaurant in SoHo. The guest list included Thomas Pynchon, John Barth, William Gaddis, Robert Coover, John Hawkes, William Gass, Kurt Vonnegut, Walter Abish, and Susan Sontag. All of them turned up except Pynchon, who was out of the state and sent his regrets, and the writers made short speeches about their work and toasted their friendship. The affair became known as the Postmodernists Dinner.

As with many occasions organized to celebrate accomplishment, the mood was valedictory. In the nineteen-sixties, most of those writers had been turning the world of American fiction on its head; in the nineteen-eighties, they were the subjects of doctoral dissertations. They had become aldermen of the towns they once set out to burn down. They had also fallen out of step. The action in American fiction after 1975 no longer involved experimentalism and mixed media; it involved minimalism and a kind of straightforward realism that many of the people in the room probably thought they had left for dead long before. Barthelme himself, though he was only fifty-two, had already begun to withdraw from the literary scene. No one has a richer appreciation of the way the big wheel keeps on turning than a postmodernist, but some of the writers may have wondered, while the glasses were being refilled, what it had all been about.

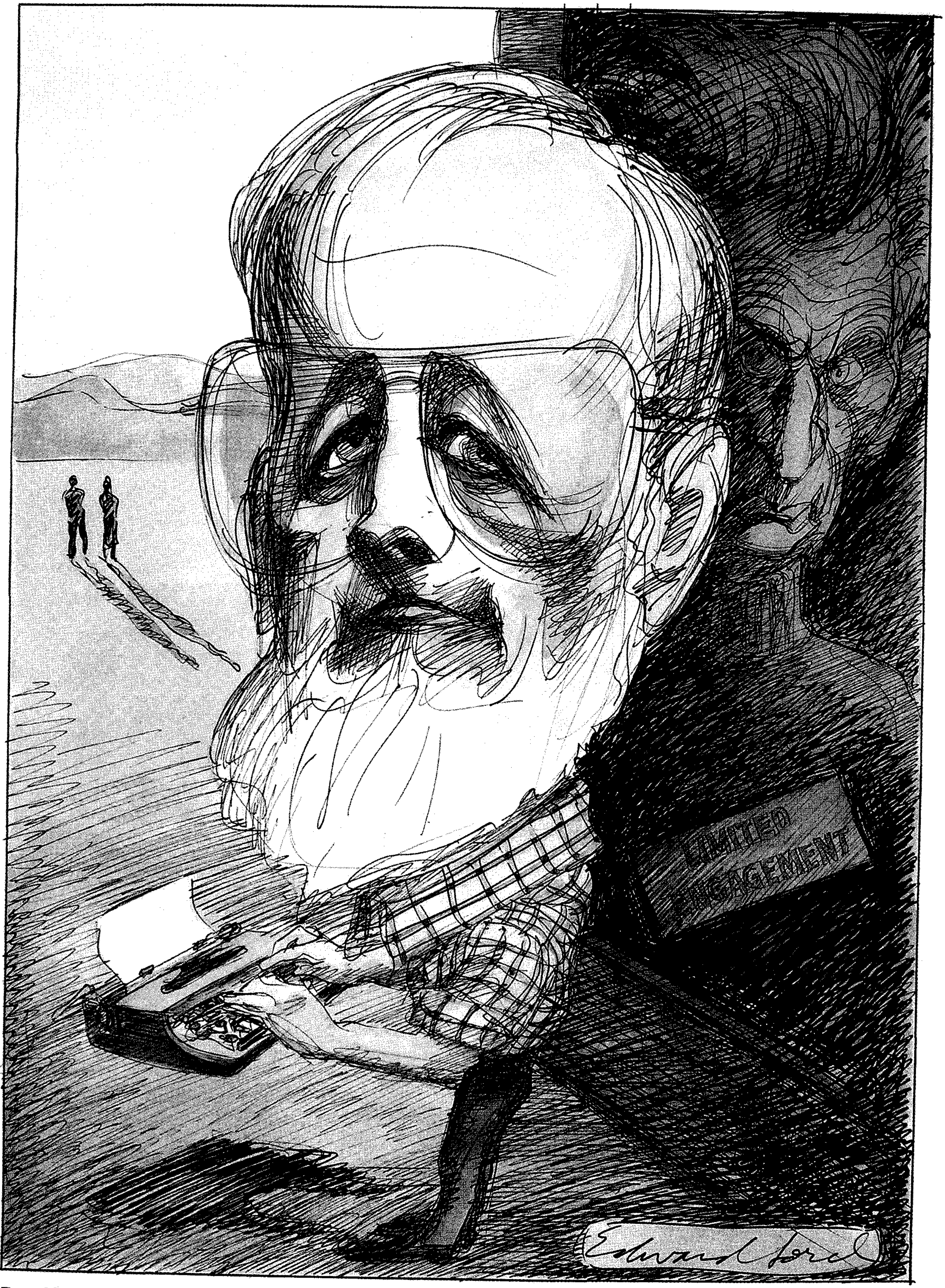
Postmodernism is the Swiss Army knife of critical concepts. It's definitionally overloaded, and it can do almost any job you need done. This is partly because, like many terms that begin with "post," it is fundamentally ambidextrous. Postmodernism can mean, "We're all modernists now. Modernism has won." Or it can mean, "No one can be a modernist anymore. Modernism is over." People who use "postmodernism" in the first, "mission accomplished," sense believe that modernism—the art and literature associated with figures like Picasso and Joyce—changed the game completely, and that everyone is still working through the consequences. Modernism is the song that never ends. Being postmodernist just means that we can never be pre-modernist again. People who use it in the second sense, as the epitaph for modernism, think that, somewhere along the line, there was a break with the assumptions, practices, and ambitions of modernist art and literature, and that everyone since then is (or ought to be) on to something very different. Being postmodernist means that we can never be modernist again.

How (in the first account) did people like Picasso and Joyce change the game? They did it by shifting interest from the what to the how of art, from the things represented in a painting or a novel to the business of representation itself. Modern art didn't abandon the world, but it made art-making part of the subject matter of art. When (in the second account) did a break occur? It happened when artists and intellectuals stopped respecting a bright-line distinction between high art and commercial culture. Modernist art and literature, in this version of the story, depended on that distinction to give its products critical authority. Modernism was formally difficult and intellectually challenging. Its thrills were not cheap. But there were cheap thrills out there, a vast and growing mass of products manufactured to stroke the senses and flatter the self-images of their consumers. This bubblegum culture wasn't just averse to the spirit of high art. It was high art's reason for being.

It's sometimes said that the distinction between high and commercial culture collapsed when artists and intellectuals discovered aesthetic merit in things like jazz and the movies. But this can't have been the case, because the idea of aesthetic merit—the belief that some works, for assignable reasons, have it and some works do not—is what kept the distinction alive in the first place. If you propose to admire a popular movie because it's formally interesting or morally exigent, you aren't changing the system of appreciation at all. There may be some new stuff above the line, but there is still a line. What killed the distinction wasn't defining pop art up. It was defining high art down. It was the recognition that serious art, too, is produced and consumed in a marketplace. The point of Warhol's Campbell's soup-can paintings was not that a soup can is like a work of art. It was that a work of art is like a soup can: they are both commodities.

This calling into question, problematizing, deconstructing—whatever you want to call it—of the status of art is what makes a lot of people uncomfortable with postmodernism in the second sense. They don't see that sort of postmodernism as demystifying; they see it as debunking. High art and literature have always been stimulated by popular sources (and have given stimulus back); and anti-art, art that thumbs its nose at aesthetic decorum, has an honored place in the modernist tradition. Duchamp and the Dadaists were making anti-art almost a hundred years ago. But you can make anti-art—

ABOVE: PIERRE DI SCIULLO; OPPOSITE: EDWARD SOREL


LIMITED ENGAGEMENT
Edward Sorel

Donald Barthelme conceived of himself as an heir of the modernist tradition—in particular, of Samuel Beckett.

Duchamp's "Fountain," for example—only when everyone still has some conception of authentic, stand-alone, for-its-own-sake art. Warhol's work is not anti-art. Finding no quality on which to hang a distinction between authentic art and everything else, it simply drops the whole question.

Donald Barthelme moved to New York City in 1962, the year that Warhol first showed the soup-can paintings. He came in order to take a job as the managing editor of an avant-garde arts magazine called *Location*, and, soon after he arrived, he published a story, in the literary magazine *Contact*, called "The Viennese Opera Ball." The story ends as follows:

> The judicial form contemplated in the agreement is that of a free trade zone to be transformed gradually into a customs union. As Emile Myerson has said, *"L'homme fait de la métaphysique comme il respire, sans le vouloir et surtout sans s'en douter la plupart du temps."* No woman is worth more than 24 cattle, Pamela Odede B. A.'s father said. With this album Abbey Lincoln's stature as one of the great jazz singers of our time is confirmed, Laura La Plante said. Widely used for motors, power tools, lighting, TV, etc. Generator output: 3500 watts, 115/230 volt, 60 cy., AC, continuous duty. Max 230 V capacitor motor, loaded on starting—1/2 hp; unloaded on starting—2 hp. Control box mounts starting switch, duplex 115 V receptacle for standard or 3-conductor grounding plugs, tandem 230 V grounding receptacles, and wing nut battery terminals. More than six hundred different kinds of forceps have been invented. Let's not talk about the lion, she said. Wilson looked over at her without smiling and now she smiled at him. This process uses a Lincoln submerged arc welding head to run both inside and outside beads automatically. The rate of progress during the first stage will determine the program to be followed in the second stage. The *Glamour* editor whose name was Tutti Beale "moved in." What's your name girl? she said coolly. Carola Mitt, Carola Mitt said. The Viennese Opera Ball continued.

Undoubtedly postmodernism of some kind, but which kind is it?

One of the aims of Tracy Daugherty's excellent biography of Barthelme, "Hiding Man" (St. Martin's; $35), is to establish that, despite what might seem compelling appearances to the contrary, Barthelme was emphatically a postmodernist in the first sense. (Daugherty doesn't much like the term "postmodernist," but Barthelme thought it was a fair one.) He argues that Barthelme believed himself to be working

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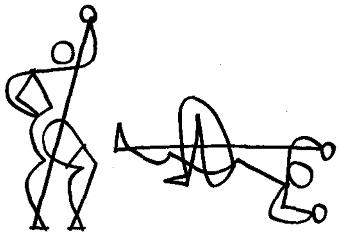
BRIEFLY NOTED

Drood, *by Dan Simmons (Little, Brown; $26.99).* In this creepy intertextual tale of professional jealousy and possible madness, Wilkie Collins tells of his friendship and rivalry with Charles Dickens, and of the mysterious phantasm named Edwin Drood, who pursues them both. Drood, cadaverous and pale, first appears at the scene of a railway accident in which Dickens was one of the few survivors; later, Dickens and Collins descend into London's sewer in search of his lair. Meanwhile, a retired police detective warns Collins that Drood is responsible for more than three hundred murders, and that he will destroy Dickens in his quest for immortality. Collins is peevish, vain, and cruel, and the most unreliable of narrators: an opium addict, prone to nightmarish visions. The narrative is overlong, with discarded subplots and red herrings, but Simmons, a master of otherworldly suspense, cleverly explores envy's corrosive effects.

The Sky Below, *by Stacey D'Erasmo (Houghton Mifflin; $24).* D'Erasmo's latest novel tells the story of a misanthropic obituary writer for a dying New York newspaper, who views his life through a series of memory boxes modelled on the assemblage art of Joseph Cornell. "I assiduously collected interesting junk, filling my pockets with pebbles and wire and old nails: the stuff of transformation," he says. He narrates the drudgery of the daily grind and scrutinizes his dysfunctional, fatherless childhood, during which he rebelled against his mother by dealing drugs and engaging in sex with men for money. Now nearing forty and spiritually broken, he is given a diagnosis of cancer and travels to a commune in Mexico, where he reluctantly receives the help of a clairvoyant eight-year-old girl. Although the book strays into portentous magic realism, its lyrical prose and telling detail create a powerful atmosphere.

The Great Gamble, *by Gregory Feifer (Harper; $27.99).* Feifer's history of the Soviet misadventure in Afghanistan, in the nineteen-eighties, comes just in time for a proposed expansion of the seven-year-old American effort there. It ought to be instructive, because the Soviet experience ("an increasingly senseless conflict") closely mirrors our own—a lightly contested invasion later thwarted by a homegrown resistance and the "Afghan tradition of shifting allegiances." Feifer assiduously chronicles Soviet errors; some, like the indiscriminate use of explosives when searching villages and the shelling of wedding parties mistaken for bands of the enemy, have close analogues in the current war. Yet, strangely, having pointed out all the parallels, Feifer persists in thinking of the American venture as a "historic opportunity" undermined by the second front, in Iraq, rather than as intrinsically hopeless.

Somewhere Towards the End, *by Diana Athill (Norton; $24.95).* Athill spent more than fifty years editing writers including Philip Roth, Norman Mailer, Jean Rhys, and V. S. Naipaul. In later life, she "had the luck to discover" that she could write; her book-world memoir, "Stet," appeared when she was eighty-three. Now, at ninety-one, she offers a spry dispatch on the condition of being elderly, having realized that copious literature describes the experience of youth, "but there is not much on record about falling away." Her perspective is both remorseless and tender as she considers the waning of her sexual desire, the sharpening of her atheist resolve, her increasing preference for nonfiction rather than novels ("I no longer feel the need to ponder human relationships . . . but I do still want to be fed facts"), and the truth that, even in her advanced state, much of her time is taken up with caring for those still older. The achievement of Athill's work is its refusal to reduce the specificities of her captivating life to homilies about wisdom.



in the tradition of Joyce and Samuel Beckett, and that his appropriation of popular, commercial, and other subartistic elements (instruction manuals, travel guides, advertisements, sentences from newspaper articles, and so on) in his writing was done as a means of making literature, not subverting it or announcing its obsolescence. Daugherty thinks that many people have got Barthelme wrong.

It's not hard to see why they might have. Barthelme's first short-story collection, "Come Back, Dr. Caligari" (1964), includes "The Joker's Greatest Triumph," which is based on characters from the Batman comics. His first novel, "Snow White," which came out in 1967, is what they used to call, on the nineteen-sixties show "Rocky and Bullwinkle," a fractured fairy tale—a modernized and mildly surrealized adult version of an already Disney-ized story. His second collection, "Unspeakable Practices, Unnatural Acts" (1968), includes a story, "The Dolt," about a man preparing to take the National Writers' Examination. In 1969, he published, in *Esquire*, "And Now Let's Hear It for the 'Ed Sullivan Show!,' " a scene-by-scene report of one of the programs in the manner of an agitated lover of the show. Many of the stories in his third collection, "City Life" (1970), are illustrated with images clipped from old books and magazines. Some of the stories are in Q. & A. form:

> Q: Is the novel dead?
> A: Oh yes. Very much so.
> Q: What replaces it?
> A: I should think that it is replaced by what existed before it was invented.
> Q: The same thing?
> A: The same sort of thing.
> Q: Is the bicycle dead?
>
> —"The Explanation"

In one story, the sentences are numbered, 1 through 100. Sections of another are in the form of headlines. And the story entitled "Sentence" is a single (unfinished) sentence that takes up eight pages.

Barthelme incorporates bits from other people's texts into his stories, and a good deal of his writing sounds like (and some of it plainly is) pastiche, as though it had been composed in the style, or spoken in the voice, of someone else:

> Curiously, in some of the most successful projects the design has been swung upon small collections of rare animals spaced (on the lost-horse principle) on a lack of grid. Carefully calculated mixes: mambas, the black wrasse, the giselle. Electrolytic jelly exhibiting a capture ratio far in excess of standard is used to fix the animals in place.
>
> —"Paraguay" (1969)

> *Songs are always composed of both traditional and new elements.* This means that you can rely on the tradition to give your song "legs" while also putting in your own experience or particular way of looking at things for the new.
>
> —"How I Write My Songs" (1978)

Even when there is straightforward narration or dialogue, the prose typically has a flat, disjointed, deliberately unliterary delivery. The writer seems to be having trouble maintaining his concentration—even the business of telling a story is treated ironically. And the humor is deadpan, as though the sentences were daring you to think they're funny. (Are you supposed to stare at the soup-can paintings, or are you just supposed to laugh? Which would be the wrong reaction?)

> Edward looked at his red beard in the tableknife. Then Edward and Pia went to Sweden, to the farm. In the mailbox Pia found a check for Willie from the government of Sweden. It was for twenty-three hundred crowns and had a rained-on look. Pia put the check in the pocket of her brown coat. Pia was pregnant. In London she had been sick every day. In London Pia and Edward had seen the Marat/Sade at the Aldwych Theatre.
>
> —"Edward and Pia" (1965)

> The city looked new with tall buildings raised while my back was turned. I rushed here and there visiting friends. They were burning beef in their backyards, brown burly men with beer cans. The beef black on the outside, red on the inside. My friend Horace had fidelity. "Listen to that bass. That's sixty watts of bass, boy."
>
> I spoke to my father. "How is business?" "If Alaska makes it," he said, "I can buy a Hasselblad. And we're keeping an eye on Hawaii." Then he photographed my veteran face, f.6 at 300. My father once a cheerleader at a great Eastern school. Jumping in the air and making fierce angry down-the-field gestures at the top of his leap.
>
> That's not a criticism. We have to have cheerleaders.
>
> —"See the Moon?" (1966)

It can certainly look, in short, as though Barthelme, like Warhol, were simply dropping the question of whether something counts as literature or not, since markers of the literary are impossible to find in his writing. The high-art traditionalist has no place to hang his beret. Daugherty's purpose is to convince us that this was not Barthelme's intention.

Daugherty has another motive as well, and this one is more personal. Barthelme spent the last eight years of his life—he died, of throat cancer, in 1989, at the age of fifty-eight—teaching creative writing at the University of Houston, and Daugherty was one of his students there. The biography is therefore partly homage to a teacher, and although one does not suspect that a lot of warts have been omitted from the portrait, the book gazes upon its subject with consistent admiration and affection. Daugherty is plainly loyal to his teacher. But this seems right, since, on most of the evidence, Barthelme was the kind of person whom people feel loyal to.

He was not uncomplicated. As Daugherty suggests by his title (which is also the title of an early Barthelme story), he was an adept of irony and deflection in person as well as on the page, a lonely and, at some level, unhappy man who needed humor and companionship. But he had, his friend Pynchon told Daugherty, "a hopeful and unbitter heart." Women seem to have found him easy to like. He married four times and had at least two long-term relationships between the marriages. He was dependent on alcohol, and he was dependent on work. He wrote every morning and had his first drink around noon. In less than thirty years, he published more than a hundred and fifty stories, four novels, a book for children, and two volumes' worth of essays, reviews, and occasional pieces. He also taught creative writing, at Boston University, the City College of New York, and Houston; lent a hand in literary-magazine ventures and conferences; and was active in the American branch of PEN. The combination of melancholia, compulsive typing, and too much alcohol might describe a lot of writers.

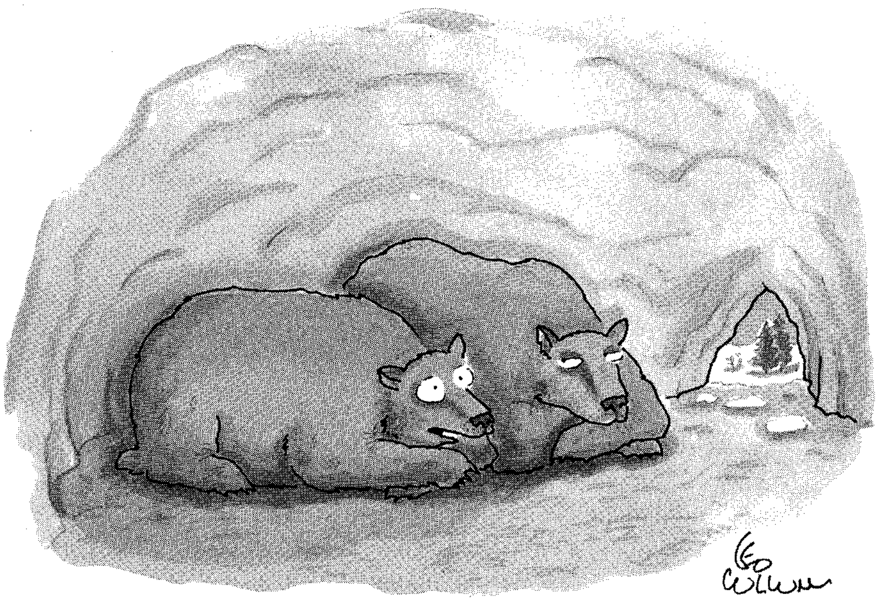
Before he was a New Yorker, Barthelme was a Texan. He grew up in Houston, where his father, also named Donald, was a prominent local architect. Donald the writer was the first of five children. Four were boys, and three of them became professional writers. Daugherty gives us a picture of the dynamics of this unusual and self-absorbed family, though not quite as sharp a picture as we get from the memoir written by Donald's brothers Frederick and Steven, "Double Down" (1999), which is the story of a gambling spree they went on after Donald, Sr., died, in 1996. (Frederick and Steven Barthelme lost more than a quarter of a million dollars, which included almost all their inheritance; the binge ended after they were indicted for cheating at blackjack. They were exonerated at the end of a hellish experience.) The Barthelme family "was pretty much a nonstop you-blinked game played by seven people," the brothers write. "Appearing to be blasé—indifferent, relaxed, casual, unconcerned—was essential protective coloration." (Even the business of telling a story is treated ironically.)

The one who kept them all on guard was the father, and he seems to have been a piece of work. Donald, Sr., had studied architecture at Penn, and he was a committed modernist, an acolyte of Mies, Le Corbusier, Aalto, and Saarinen. He designed his own home, including the interiors, and if he couldn't find something that suited his taste—a rug or a piece of furniture—he manufactured it himself. The children participated in this continuous redecoration of their house with enthusiasm, but at the price of being exposed to a lot of ridicule. "Our father was very good at ridicule," Frederick and Steven report; and it was worst, they say, for Donald and their sister, Joan, who were the oldest, and who "often alluded to the terror of our father's attention in *their* childhoods, a kind of vague, best-left-unsaid eyebrow-raising that effectively communicated the terrifying things they had once been subjected to."

An uncompromising temper appears to have limited the father's career as an architect. The brothers describe a scene in which their father picks up an LP record that says "unbreakable" on the label and breaks it in two. "Not unbreakable," he says. That might be a little scary for kids to watch. Frederick and Steven thought that he was an ingenious man, but they found him fascinatingly difficult to care for in his old age; their memoir is an attempt to understand their gambling obsession as a way of coping with guilt over his death. ("The addiction to gambling, with the unsuccessful struggles to break the habit and the opportunities it affords for self-punishment, is a repetition of the compulsion to masturbate," Freud says in "Dostoevsky and Parricide"; "the relation between efforts to suppress it and fear of the father are too well known to need more than a mention." No one believes Freud anymore, of course.)

Donald, Jr., therefore was brought up in an avant-garde environment not typical of the average middle-class Houston boy. He went to St. Thomas Catholic High School (the Barthelmes were Catholics; some lapsed, some not) and then to the University of Houston, where his father was a professor in the architecture department, but from which he dropped out. He worked as a reporter on the night desk at the Houston *Post*, got married, and was drafted into the Army and sent to Korea. (An armistice was signed the day he arrived.) Even in the Army, he kept reading and working on his writing: he had a remarkable self-education in modern literature and philosophy. Not long after he returned to Houston, in 1955, he divorced and married again, and started up a journal at the university called *Forum*, for which he sought out and published many of the writers who were, or would become, big names in the world of literary intellectuals, including Norman Mailer, Walker Percy, and Marshall McLuhan. Members of the editorial board, distressed by an essay by William Gass that they found impenetrable, finally suggested that Barthelme was assuming "too much interest, background, and mental acuteness on the part of *Forum's* readers," and he resigned.

In 1960, he joined the board of Houston's Contemporary Arts Association, and in 1961 became the director of its museum. Through these offices, he brought contemporary arts and letters to Houston: he arranged performances of Beckett's "Krapp's Last Tape" and Edward Albee's "Zoo Story"; poetry readings by Kenneth Koch, W. D. Snodgrass, and Robert Bly; and art exhibitions that included paintings by Willem de Kooning and Richard Diebenkorn. One of the luminaries he attracted was the art critic Harold Rosenberg, first to the pages of *Forum* and later to the museum, where he lectured before an audience of modest size. Rosenberg, along with his friend Thomas Hess, the editor of *Art News*, was launching *Location*, and he invited Barthelme to come to New York City to be the magazine's managing editor. Barthelme must have felt that his taste was too advanced for Houston, and he wasted no time making a decision. The move ended his



"If I knew what our 401k was doing, maybe I could sleep."

marriage, but it established his career.

He found an apartment on West Eleventh Street, off Sixth Avenue, across the street from Grace Paley, whose short-story collection "The Little Disturbances of Man," which Barthelme admired, had come out in 1959. They became good friends. (Paley was a prototypical Village activist; she and Barthelme later had a falling-out over her behavior at a PEN conference.) A couple of years after Barthelme took the apartment, the writer Kirkpatrick Sale and his wife, Faith, an editor, moved in downstairs and became close friends. They had been students at Cornell with Pynchon, and Pynchon would write part of "Gravity's Rainbow" (1973) in their apartment. Soon after arriving in New York, Barthelme hired an agent and by 1963 had pieces accepted by *Harper's Bazaar* and *The New Yorker*. He went on to publish the remarkable run of books from "Come Back, Dr. Caligari" to "City Life."

"Nobody in the world had seen writing like this," Roger Angell, who was Barthelme's editor and champion at *The New Yorker*, said to Daugherty. *The New Yorker* was Barthelme's chief venue, and there was something astonishing about the stories of his that appeared there in the nineteen-sixties, and about the novel "Snow White," which the magazine ran in its entirety. There was a lot of talk in those years about how art and literature needed to reflect the craziness of the times, and Barthelme's work really seemed to. In some uncanny way, where he was at was where his readers were at, though they didn't quite realize it until they read him. People looked for his name in the magazine every week, and they read his stories as though they were catching up on the news.

What was he doing? Daugherty is right to claim that Barthelme conceived of himself as an heir of the modernist tradition—in particular, of Beckett. He encountered Beckett's work for the first time in 1956, when he picked up a copy of *Theatre Arts* at Guy's Newsstand, in Houston, and read the text of "Waiting for Godot." "It seemed that from the day he discovered 'Godot,' Don believed he could write the fiction he imagined," the woman who was his wife at the time, Helen Moore Barthelme, says in her memoir, "Donald Barthelme: The Genesis of a Cool Sound" (2001). "It would be from an ironical perspective of the world and he could use his wit and intellect in a way that would satisfy himself." Beckett was the writer who made Barthelme feel that it was all right to write like Donald Barthelme, and he acknowledged the debt all his life. "I'm just overwhelmed by Beckett," he told two radio interviewers in 1975.

The "anxiety of influence" situation that resulted was perfectly obvious to Barthelme. He undoubtedly already knew something about that kind of anxiety from his uncomfortable relationship with Donald Barthelme, Sr., and a great deal of his writing is, at one level of explicitness or another, about the authority of fathers and the struggle for autonomy. (And Barthelme was a close reader of Freud.)

> My father regards the tray of pink cupcakes. Then he jams his thumb into each cupcake, into the top. Cupcake by cupcake. A thick smile spreads over the face of each cupcake.
>
> —"Views of My Father Weeping" (1969)

"Not unbreakable."

But Barthelme felt that American fiction had abandoned what modernists called "the revolution of the word." "Fiction after Joyce seems to have devoted itself to propaganda, to novels of social relationships, to short stories constructed mousetrap-like to supply, at the finish, a tiny insight typically having to do with innocence violated, or to works written as vehicles for saying no! in thunder," he wrote in 1964, in the second issue (there would be only two) of *Location*. That journal was all about reinvigorating American poetry and fiction, but it was run by two men, Rosenberg and Hess, who were identified with an artistic movement that had flourished more than ten years earlier, Abstract Expressionism. Barthelme admired the Abstract Expressionists, and particularly de Kooning, who was Rosenberg's great modernist hero, but he felt that the magazine was out of touch. "We are heavily committed to the leading figures of an achieved revolution," he complained in a memo to his bosses. "We are not defending a stockade"—that was how Rosenberg had defined the situation of the avant-garde in an editorial statement—"but guarding a bank. . . . We have to take a radical position with regard to American literature, admit its minor virtues and announce that it lacks necessity and point out its immense shortcomings."

Having worked at the Contemporary Arts Museum in Houston, and then in New York for two art-world figures at a magazine covering the arts, Barthelme naturally looked to what was going on in painting for a way to get back to the spirit of Joyce and Beckett without merely copying Joyce and Beckett. The method he struck on was collage, and the easiest way to understand what he was doing with it is to compare his work with the work of another Texan in New York, Robert Rauschenberg.

Rauschenberg was six years older than Barthelme, and his background was completely different. His father had no schooling beyond the third grade; he was an employee of the Gulf States Utilities, in Port Arthur, and his main interests were fishing and hunting. Rauschenberg's parents didn't pay much attention to him. Though he loved to draw as a child, he didn't realize that there was such a thing as "an artist" until he visited the Huntington Art Gallery, in San Marino, California, while he was on furlough from the Navy, and saw some portrait paintings. He recognized two of the images: he had seen them on the backs of playing cards. After his discharge, and with the help of the G.I. Bill, he pursued a peripatetic arts education, at the Kansas City Art Institute; the Académie Julian, in Paris; Black Mountain College, in North Carolina; and the Art Students League, in New York City.

He had his first show, at the Betty Parsons Gallery, in New York, in 1951. No pieces were sold (though Rauschenberg gave one to the composer John Cage, who was a friend). Interest did not build quickly. Even after he began his creative relationship with Jasper Johns, in 1954, Johns was the artist whose work—he was just beginning the American-flag paintings—people were excited about. But when Barthelme arrived Rauschenberg was at the center of the New York art world; he would win the Grand Prize in painting at the Venice Biennale in 1964.

Rauschenberg had a radical approach to materials: he made art out of anything. This was, in part, a consequence of his training at Black Mountain under Josef Albers, an ex-Bauhaus disciplinarian who apparently disliked Rauschenberg when Rauschenberg was his student and later claimed not to remember him. Albers sometimes made his students work with found objects, and Rauschenberg took that part of the lesson to heart. His promiscuity when it came to materials was also the consequence of sometimes having no money for paint or canvas. But he made do with whatever was around as a way of pushing the limits of painting. He would buy paint cans whose labels had come off, so that he wouldn't know the color before he used it, in order to let the materials dictate the product.

Rauschenberg's signature early works, the combines, were begun in 1954, before he started silk-screening images onto the canvas, a technique he learned from Warhol. The best-known is the stuffed goat with an automobile tire around its middle, "Monogram," which Rauschenberg started in 1955, after finding the goat at a secondhand office-furniture store, and finished in 1959, when he figured out what to do with the tire and painted a wooden "pasture" for the piece to stand on. "Coca Cola Plan" (1958) includes two cast-metal wings and three Coke bottles; "Bed" (1955) is made from an old quilt, a sheet, and a pillow; and so on.

Duchamp used found objects to make art—the urinal, the bicycle wheel, the snow shovel. But selection is an important feature of those works: there is a certain fastidiousness at the heart of the Duchampian aesthetic. The heart of the Rauschenberg aesthetic is messiness. Combining found materials in collages was not new with Rauschenberg, either. But traditional collage arranges fragments into a form, and Rauschenberg's collages are not organized in any ordinarily legible manner. "Rebus" (1955) is a little more than ten feet long; it includes part of an election poster, a photograph of two runners, a page of newspaper comic strips, a reproduction of Botticelli's "Birth of Venus," a pinup shot, a self-portrait by Dürer, another photograph of the runners, and a child's drawing of a woman. The title is a joke: you cannot read the piece in any direction. Like most of Rauschenberg's work, it has no center. Form, in the conventional sense of a hierarchical order, is one of the things that he is trying to eliminate.

"The principle of collage is one of the central principles of art in this century and it seems also to me to be one of the central principles of literature," Barthelme said at a symposium on fiction in 1975. He loved the messy—"that wonderful category," he called it in a catalogue essay for an exhibition of Rauschenberg's work in Houston, in 1985—and he was fascinated by the artistic possibilities of the ugly. He once called his own stories "slumgullions," and he tried to create a certain amount of extraneous noise in them, on the theory that the distraction helped the reader. "The confusing signals, the impurity of the signal, gives you verisimilitude," he explained. "As when you attend a funeral and notice, against your will, that it's being *poorly done*." One of his favorite accomplishments as a museum director was a show called "New American Artifacts: The Ugly Show," which he mounted in 1960, and for which he collected, from junk shops and pawnshops, a baby-blue Styrofoam chrysanthemum, a hubcap, a jukebox, an unpainted paint-by-numbers picture of lambs, three bad reproductions of Gainsborough's "The Blue Boy," a copy of *Ricky Nelson Magazine*, and similar detritus.

In the production of found-material art, the painter has an obvious advantage, and Barthelme was aware of the problem.

> Yes I know it's shatteringly ingenuous but I wanted to be a painter. They get away with murder in my view; Mr. X. on the *Times* agrees with me. You don't know how I envy them. They can pick up a Baby Ruth wrapper on the street, glue it to the canvas (in the *right place*, of course, there's that), and lo! People crowd about and cry, "A real Baby Ruth wrapper, by God, what *could be realer than that!*" Fantastic metaphysical advantage. You hate them, if you're ambitious.
>
> —"See the Moon?" (1966)

The visual artist can deal with almost every kind of material, even sound, but the writer deals with only one kind of material: sentences. The solution, therefore, was to treat sentences as though they were found objects.

We rarely experience sentences this way, because we're trying to look through them to the things they represent, just as, in traditional easel painting, we look through the canvas, as though it were a window, onto the world it represents. That's the kind of looking and reading that modernism was committed to disrupting. When Barthelme incorporates into "The Viennese Opera Ball" the two sentences from "The Short, Happy Life of Francis Macomber,"

> Let's not talk about the lion, she said. Wilson looked over at her without smiling and now she smiled at him,

what matters to the effect is not the characters in Hemingway's story but that these sentences have the look of Hemingway sentences. It also matters that they are followed by a sentence with which they have no logical relation:

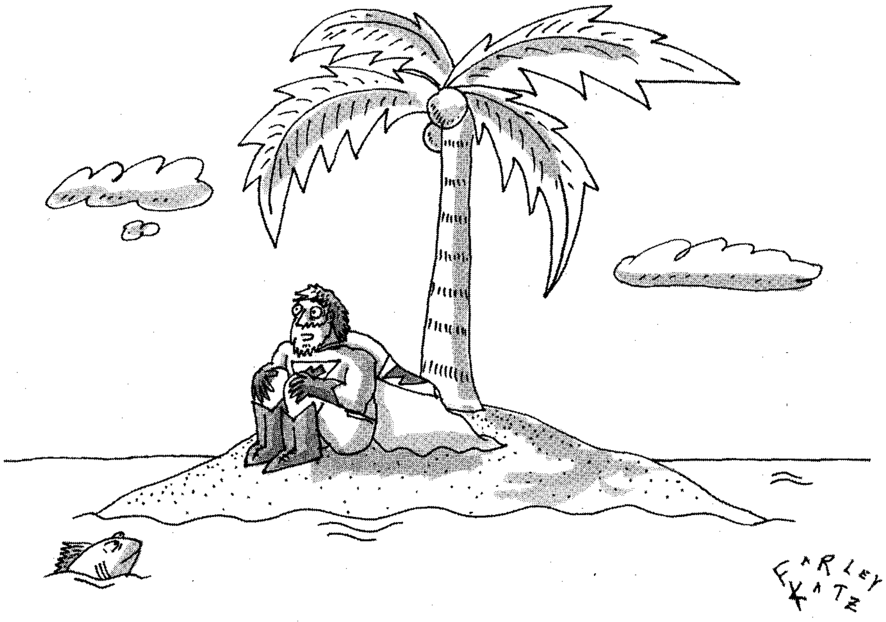
> This process uses a Lincoln submerged arc welding head to run both inside and outside beads automatically.

It's the juxtaposition that brings out the "thingness" of the Hemingway sentences. Most readers are likely to recognize, and thus to "fill in," the context for those sentences, but almost no one will recognize the sentence about the Lincoln submerged arc welding head, or even have a very clear understanding of what it means. It is a harder sentence to "see through."

> Q: What do you consider the most important tool of the genius of today?
>
> A: Rubber cement.
>
> —"The Genius" (1971)

Barthelme learned this technique from the surrealists, whose work he was introduced to by his father. The illogic, the apparent absurdity, of a Rauschenberg collage or a Barthelme story makes people impatient, because it seems to violate ordinary habits of perception and understanding. But we experience the arbitrary juxtaposition of radically disparate materials every day, when we look at the front page of a newspaper. A story like Barthelme's "The Indian Uprising" (1965), one of the great literary responses to the Vietnam War, is an effort to make you really see what's on the front page, as though for the first time.

Barthelme wrote the story in Copenhagen, where he met the woman who would become his third wife, Birgit. The setting is the uprising of the title, but the story includes Sylvia, of whom the narrator is enamored and who plays Fauré on the piano; a teacher, Miss R., who says that the litany is the only form of discourse of which she approves; Kenneth, who wants to be Jean-Luc Godard; Jane, beaten up by a dwarf in a bar on Tenerife; heroin in the ghetto; barricades composed of detritus; and a captured Comanche who, under torture, gives his name as Gustave Aschenbach, born at L—, in the province of Silesia.



"Oh my God—I just remembered I can fly."

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> Strings of language extend in every direction to bind the world into a rushing, ribald whole.

The babble of discursive registers mimics the incoherence of war against guerrillas, a war in which the two sides are always in danger of becoming morally indistinguishable.

Barthelme shared the surrealists' faith that, by an intuition operating below the threshold of consciousness—he called this the faculty of "not-knowing"—the juxtaposition of unlike to unlike could trigger a new kind of awareness, one that is normally buried under the predictability of conventional usage. "To reclaim a sight from a museum . . . is a struggle because of the torrent of blague (of whatever quality) that surrounds even the most modest cultural manifestation," he wrote in 1987, in a catalogue essay for a gallery exhibition that included Sherrie Levine's photographs of famous photographs. "Unmediated experience is hard to come by. . . . Levine, having been original in negating originality, is now free to be original."

> Irony is a means of depriving the object of its reality in order that the subject may feel free.
>
> —"Kierkegaard Unfair to Schlegel" (1968)

Barthelme believed just what Mallarmé believed, that the purpose of literature is to renew the language of the tribe.

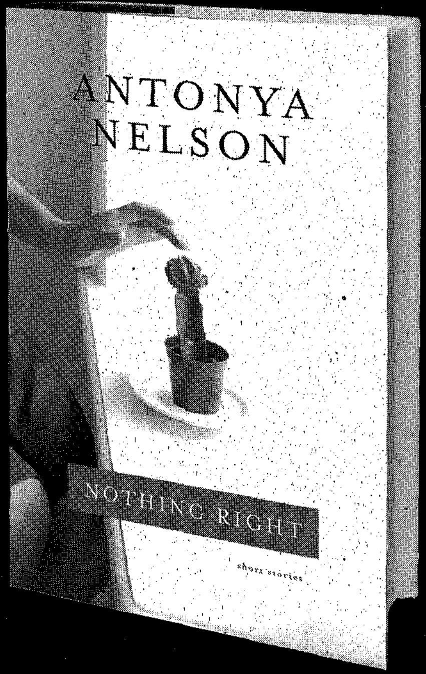
He also believed that one of the things deadening our responses was mass culture. He used hackneyed prose in his pieces all the time, and he was a connoisseur of the linguistically tired and poor. "Any sentence that begins with the phrase, 'It is not clear that . . .' is clearly clumsy but preparing itself for greatness of a kind," he explained in an interview in *Partisan Review*. "A way of backing into a story—of getting past the reader's hardwon armor." But he detested writing whose badness was unself-conscious, without irony. He complained that book publishers "publish an enormous number of things which look like books, sort of feel like books, but in reality are buckets of peanut butter with a layer of whipped cream on top." He warned about "the ferocious appropriation of high culture by commercial culture," and he complained about being compared with the Pop artists—he called the association "dismaying." He had no patience for conceptual art. "Had I decided to go into the conceptual-art business," he said in an interview, "I could turn out railroad cars full of that stuff every day."

He thought that the goal of writing was access to the ineffable. "If there is any word I detest in the language, this would be it," he said at the fiction symposium in 1975, but "I believe that's the place artists are trying to get to, and I further believe that when they are successful, they reach it . . . an area somewhere probably between mathematics and religion, in which what may fairly be called truth exists." He was an enemy of television. He was a serious jazz buff. It took him a while to become interested in rock. Daugherty is right. He was a postmodernist in the first sense.

There is another piece to Barthelme, and this has to do with *The New Yorker*. Barthelme decided that he wanted to be a *New Yorker* writer when he was a teen-ager, and what drew him to the magazine was the humor writing. He loved James Thurber and Dorothy Parker; he thought S. J. Perelman was a genius. "Perelman was the first true American surrealist," he says in the *Partisan Review* interview, "of a rank in the world surrealist movement with the best." (Daugherty tells us that Perelman, sadly, did not think much of Barthelme's work.) Barthelme's first piece for the magazine was a parody of an Antonioni screenplay, "L'Lapse" (Antonioni released "L'Eclisse" in 1962), and he wrote many more casuals (most of which are collected in "The Teachings of Don B."). The humorist is the

"SHE'S ABSOLUTELY ONE OF MY FAVORITES...

and I envy the reader who has yet to discover her work."
—MICHAEL CHABON



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hiding man in Barthelme's stories, the reassurance that we are in the company of a friendly spirit, someone who knows about more than just collecting rubbish and tearing things up.

Gass disliked what many people consider Barthelme's greatest story, "Robert Kennedy Saved from Drowning." "The idea is to *use* dreck, not write about it," he said. William Shawn had trouble with the story as well, and, when he asked Barthelme to substitute a fictitious name for Kennedy's, Barthelme gave the piece to Ted Solotaroff, the editor of *New American Review*, where it was published in 1968, two months before Kennedy was assassinated. The story is composed of vignettes—"K. at His Desk," "Described by Secretaries," "Childhood of K. as Recalled by a Former Teacher," "With Young People," and so on. The pastiche of the slick-magazine political profile is pitch-perfect—Barthelme had begun the story but put it aside, and Daugherty thinks that he finished it because he had heard that Saul Bellow was writing a profile of Kennedy for *Life*—but only one of the vignettes, about Kennedy visiting an art gallery, is based on something that really happened. The ending, in which the narrator pulls Kennedy—dressed as Zorro, his cape and sword on the shore but still wearing his mask—from the water, is the one obvious fantasy. But the accumulation of faux reportage casts a weird light of realism on it, as in a dream that you know is a dream but from which you cannot wake. It is as though the story said, "You believed all that. Why shouldn't you believe this?"

"The aim of literature," says a character in "Florence Green Is 81," one of Barthelme's first published stories, "is the creation of a strange object covered with fur which breaks your heart." Helen Moore Barthelme says that the line was inspired by an object he saw at a Contemporary Arts Museum exhibit; Daugherty assumes it was that classic work of surrealism Meret Oppenheim's "Object" (1936)—the fur-lined teacup. Barthelme once suggested that the main weakness of his writing was a lack of emotion, but in this he was plainly wrong. His stories were too wild to be emotional mousetraps, it's true, but he was a master of the ending. There is always a little tug, in all the mess, a melody we recognize. He could catch you unexpectedly.

After "City Life," Barthelme published his children's book, "The Slightly Irregular Fire Engine; or, The Hithering Thithering Djinn" (1971), which won a National Book Award; two more collections, "Sadness" (1972) and "Guilty Pleasures" (1974); and his second novel, "The Dead Father" (1975). That book is so nakedly a struggle to make a dark comedy of the author's relationship with his two fathers, Beckett and Donald, Sr., that it is painful to read. Even a Freudian might wince:

> At that moment the Dead Father approached Thomas, holding a small box.
>
> A present, he said, for you.
>
> Thank you, said Thomas, what is it?
>
> Open it, said the Dead Father. Open the box.
>
> Thomas opened the box and found a knife.
>
> Thank you, he said, what is it for?
>
> Use it, said the Dead Father. Cut something. Cut something off.

Barthelme continued to write assiduously, and he produced, along with his other fiction, some sublime parodies:

> *September 1, 1824*
>
> Today Goethe inveighed against certain critics who had, he said, completely misunderstood Lessing. He spoke movingly about how such obtuseness had partially embittered Lessing's last years, and speculated that it was because Lessing was both critic and dramatist that the attacks had been of more than usual ferocity. Critics, Goethe said, are the cracked mirror in the grand ballroom of the creative spirit. No, I said, they were, rather, the extra baggage on the great cabriolet of conceptual progress. "Eckermann," said Goethe, "*shut up*."
>
> —"Conversations with Goethe" (1980)

Barthelme oversaw two major collections of his work, "Sixty Stories," published in 1981, and "Forty Stories," which came out in 1987, two years before he died. His writing became less experimental, but after 1975 the interest in literary experiment, like the interest in most of the cultural excitement of the nineteen-sixties, was no longer the fashion. Ann Beattie and Raymond Carver were the new voices in short fiction. The interest in experiment would come back, of course. The big wheel does turn. Daugherty is right that the world seems ready for another look at what Barthelme accomplished for American fiction. ◆

NEWYORKER.COM
Louis Menand talks about Barthelme.

MUSICAL EVENTS

THE YOUNGEST MASTER

Mendelssohn at two hundred.

BY ALEX ROSS

Felix Mendelssohn, whose two-hundredth birthday fell on February 3rd, was the most amazing child prodigy in musical history. "What about Mozart?" you may ask. Go talk to Goethe, who heard the child Mozart in 1763 and the child Mendelssohn almost sixty years later, and who gave the palm to young Felix. According to Goethe, Mendelssohn bore "the same relation to the little Mozart that the perfect speech of a grown man does to the prattle of a child." Even if Goethe got a bit carried away, his enthusiasm is understandable. Mendelssohn began composing at the age of ten, and within a year or two he was producing pieces that were technically secure and, at times, strikingly imaginative. Two of his adolescent works—the Octet for Strings and the Overture to "A Midsummer Night's Dream"—have won permanent places in the repertory. Mozart reached a comparable level only in his early twenties.

In late January, an organization called the Mendelssohn Project, led by Stephen Somary, presented a concert at the Museum of Jewish Heritage, highlighting youthful arcana that had been retrieved from libraries and collections. Orion Weiss played a Piano Sonata in F Minor that Mendelssohn wrote in 1820, when he was eleven; the first movement came off like a virtuoso student exercise, but the second movement turned into something much more individual, its main theme pirouetting wistfully, like a Bach Sarabande. The Shanghai Quartet deftly presented twelve fugues for strings, from 1821; these again showed Mendelssohn's uncanny sympathy for Bach, which his teacher, Carl Zelter, instilled in him. (The boy once dumbfounded Zelter by finding a contrapuntal error in one of the Brandenburg Concertos.) And Weiss accompanied Weigang Li in a vibrant performance of the one-movement Violin Sonata in D Minor (1823), whose ornate chord progressions and mercurial passagework indicate a scarily rapid maturation.

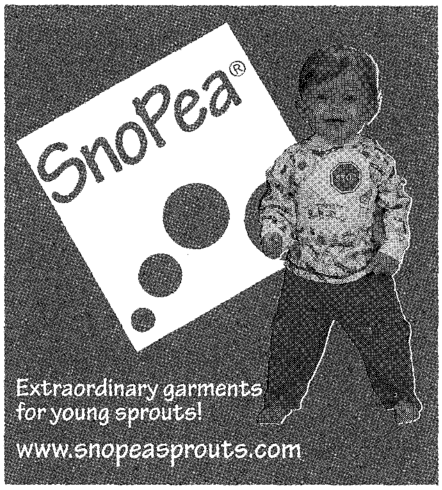
In his teens, Mendelssohn found a fiercely elegant musical voice.

ANDRÉ CARRILHO

By his mid-teens, Mendelssohn had found his own fiercely elegant voice. The Octet burns with a kind of happy fury; Larry Todd, Mendelssohn's most authoritative biographer, has argued that its lunging themes and crackling counterpoint were inspired by scenes from Goethe's "Faust." Even more staggering is the "Midsummer Night's Dream" Overture, which offers one magical tableau after another: the opening harmonies of winds and horns, their notes gleaming like stars emerging from mist; an elfin scurrying of strings; opulent themes for the royals and a rugged dance for Bottom and the players; and the coda for Puck, which moves beyond comedy into some sphere of transcendent sadness. Rich in feeling, free of excess, it almost sounds like the statement of a wise old man—a musical Goethe, dreaming of youth. That it came from a boy of seventeen essentially defies explanation.

The question for Mendelssohn, as for all prodigies, was "What next?" He went on writing music until he suffered a fatal series of strokes, at the age of thirty-eight. Works such as the "Hebrides" Overture, the "Scottish" and "Italian" symphonies, and the Violin Concerto showed no obvious falling-off of inspiration. He was lionized in Central Europe and also in England, where he became something like a guest national composer. But there were mutterings of discontent. Hector Berlioz complained that Mendelssohn was "rather too fond of the dead." Heinrich Heine mocked his "very serious seriousness," saying that the music lacked the raw feeling, the "naïveté," essential to the highest art. By 1900, critics were dismissing Mendelssohn as a relic of the Biedermeier and Victorian eras, of the bourgeois cult of comfort. George Bernard Shaw lambasted the composer's "kid-glove gentility, his conventional sentimentality, and his despicable oratorio mongering." Mendelssohn remained popular, but he seemed to slip from the ranks of the truly great.

One attack created particularly nasty resonances—that of Richard Wagner, whose pamphlet "Judaism in Music," published in 1850, identified Mendelssohn as one of a number of insectoid Jewish entities who had infested the body of German art. Somary, in remarks made at the Museum of Jewish Heritage, stated that Wagner had brought about the "sup-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pression" of Mendelssohn, drawing a link between "Judaism in Music" and the Nazi ban on Jewish music. Somary made a passionate case, although he simplified a tortured relationship. Wagner revered Mendelssohn in his youth, and behind the anti-Semitic bile lay an abiding, if grudging, admiration. In later years, Wagner played the overtures at the piano and sang melodies from "A Midsummer Night's Dream" to his children. Mendelssohn even haunted Wagner's sleep; one night Wagner dreamed that his older colleague had addressed him with *du*—the intimate second-person pronoun. "Parsifal," Wagner's final work, pays homage to Mendelssohn on more than one page of the score.

"He never lost control of himself," Wagner once said of Mendelssohn. The fundamental problem for so many Romantically inclined listeners was that Mendelssohn had no interest in what the scholar Peter Mercer-Taylor has called "unchecked personal self-expression." Instead, his oratorios, choruses, glees, and parlor songs were intended to foster fellow-feeling and to serve as an aesthetic model for the upright life. In this, he succeeded triumphantly; there are still Mendelssohn Clubs—community choruses and singing societies—in cities across America. The challenge for contemporary performers is to tease out the complexity that dwells below a deceptively well-bred surface.

Celebrations of the Mendelssohn bicentennial have paled next to the epic Mozart blowout of 2006, but a respectable quantity of Mendelssohn's music has been heard in New York halls in recent weeks. The Mendelssohn Project presented its trove of lost scores; the New York Philharmonic gave an all-Mendelssohn program; James Levine led a robust "Italian" Symphony, with the Met Orchestra; and the Lyric Chamber Music Society offered an absorbing evening of vocal and piano rarities, including the premières of two newly discovered "Songs Without Words." The Lyric program, which featured finely expressive singing by Ying Huang, also contained two songs by Fanny Hensel, the composer's sister, who possessed comparable talent but was forced to give up a musical career in favor of marriage and motherhood. (Later this season, the Lyric will present Hensel's Piano Trio in D Minor, a formidable, extravagantly gesturing work that seems almost a response to her brother's habitual self-containment.)

The Philharmonic did Mendelssohn right by inviting Kurt Masur, its former music director, to preside over the birthday bash. Long the leader of the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, which Mendelssohn once molded into the best orchestra in Germany, Masur believes deeply in the music and effectively communicates his faith. In the "Ruy Blas" Overture and the cantata "Die erste Walpurgisnacht," he elicited a sound at once graceful and muscular, drawing out timbral grit, textural roughness, and emotional heat. The Violin Concerto fared less well, on account of a weirdly charmless solo turn by Anne-Sophie Mutter. The German virtuoso brought to bear her usual bowing power, sultry tone, and precision of intonation, but she gave a textbook lesson in how not to perform Mendelssohn. The shimmering opening melody turned into a shapeless stream of notes. Accents and slurs vanished in a rush of superficial excitement. Minute gradations of emotion gave way to exaggerated, pseudo-modern statements.

But Mendelssohn is thriving in other hands. The violinist Daniel Hope and the Chamber Orchestra of Europe recently made a bold, stylish recording of the Violin Concerto, alongside one of the finest modern accounts of the Octet. Both the Emerson and the Pacifica Quartets have released expressively pointed surveys of Mendelssohn's quartets. Last year, I heard the Brentano Quartet give a taut performance of the Quartet in F Minor, Mendelssohn's final major piece, and one whose gruff rhythms and grinding chromatic lines suggest a creative departure. The composer's beloved sister had just died, and, according to a tantalizing recent report in the British press, he may have been suffering from an infatuation with the Swedish soprano Jenny Lind. Mendelssohn seemed, in other words, on the verge of losing control. If he had lived to harness those darker emotions, particularly in the realm of opera, he might have become the rival that Wagner obviously feared. ♦

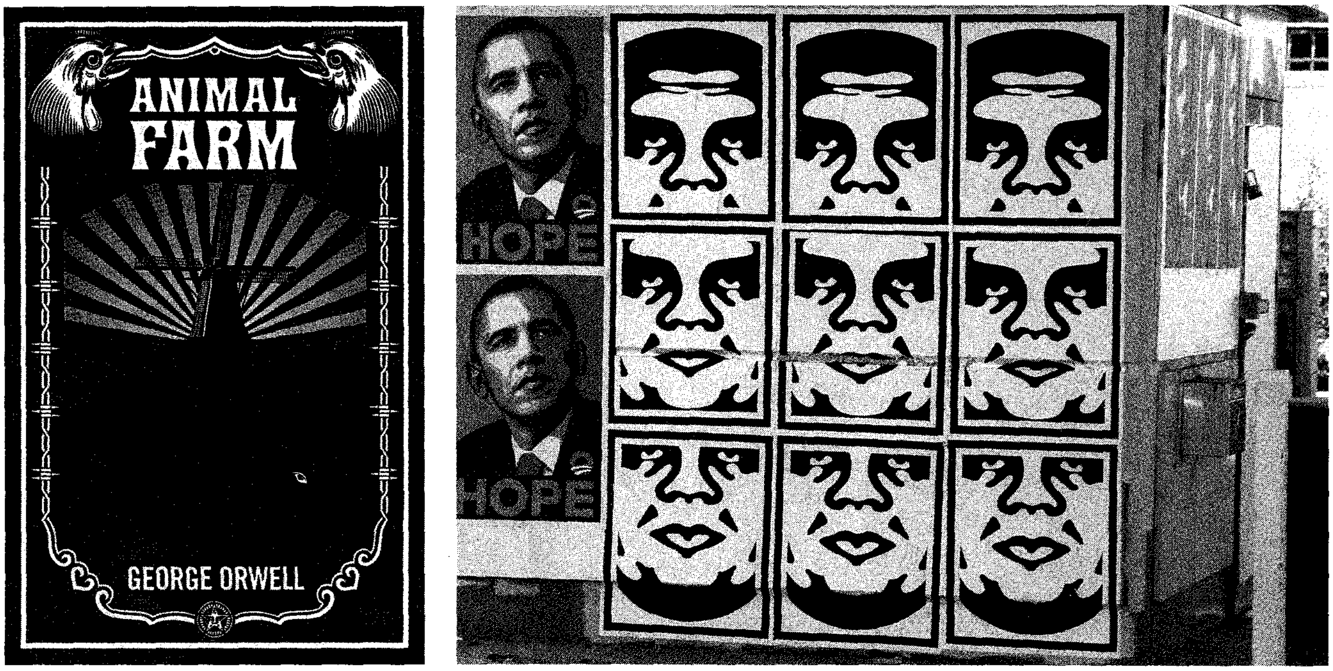
THE ART WORLD

HOPE AND GLORY

A Shepard Fairey moment.

BY PETER SCHJELDAHL

It was only about a year ago, though it feels like half a lifetime, that Shepard Fairey created the most efficacious American political illustration since "Uncle Sam Wants You": the Obama "Hope" poster. In innumerable variants, the craning, intent, elegant mien of the candidate engulfed the planet. I won't forget coming across it, last summer, stencilled on a sidewalk of a hamlet in the upper Catskills, where cell phones don't work and most people, if they vote at all, vote Republican. Underfoot, the small, tidy image organized its rustic environs as a frame for itself, like Wallace Stevens's jar in Tennessee. I was delighted, as an Obama supporter. But I was a trifle disturbed, too, by the intrusion on a tranquil—and, it suddenly proved, defenseless—reality of weathered houses amid humpback mountains. The result was strident and mystical, yanking my mind into a placeless jet stream of abstract associations. It exploited a familiar graphic device—exalted and refined by Andy Warhol—of polarizing photographs into solid darks and blank lights, thus rendering volumetric subjects dead flat. Mentally restoring those splotches to rounded substance makes us feel clever, on the important condition that the subject excites us enough to elicit the effort. The reward with Fairey's picture was a thrill of concerted purpose, guarded against fatuity by coolly candid deliberation. The effect is that of epic poetry in an everyday tongue.



Fairey's cover for a 2008 British edition of Orwell's novel, which he cites as an inspiration, and a wall of Fairey's street posters.

LEFT: PENGUIN BOOKS; RIGHT: KYLE OLDOERP

A "Hope" poster hangs alongside about two hundred and fifty slick and, for the most part, far more resistible works in a Fairey retrospective, his first, at the Institute of Contemporary Art, in Boston. The thirty-nine-year-old Fairey, a Los Angeles-based street artist, graphic designer, and entrepreneur, was born and raised in Charleston, South Carolina, where his father is a doctor. At fourteen, Fairey, a budding rascal, started decorating skateboards and T-shirts. He graduated from the technically rigorous Rhode Island School of Design with a bachelor's degree in illustration, in 1992. While a student in Providence, he took to applying gnomic stickers and posters, without permission, to buildings and signs. The signature image of his street work is the cartooned face of the wrestler Andre the Giant (André René Roussimoff, who died in 1993, and is fondly remembered for his role in the 1987 film "The Princess Bride"), accompanied at first by the wacky caption "Andre the Giant Has a Posse" and later by "Obey Giant" or, simply, "Obey." Lyrically paranoid, the motif was inspired by the artist's reading of George Orwell's "Animal Farm" and "1984"—a connection that looped back to the source last year when Penguin U.K. reissued those books with new cover designs, by Fairey. Fairey's street work popularized a going fashion for academic deconstruction, with pretensions to exposing the malign operations of mass culture. Hip rather than populist, the Andre campaign projects an audience dumb enough to fall for media manipulation while smart enough to absorb a critique of it. And, of course, it's vandalism—in the vein of urban graffiti—invading environments whose inhabitants, for all any artist knows, might value them just as they are. Boston's I.C.A. has condoned a citywide smattering of street art by Fairey, as an extension of the show. That makes sense. So does the decision of the Boston police to arrest him for it, on his way to the show's opening.

Fairey has run into a similarly predict-

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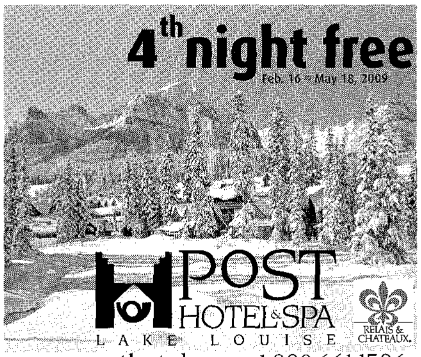

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able legal snarl with the "Hope" poster, having lifted the image from an Associated Press photograph. The original shows Obama seated at a dais (next to George Clooney) at the National Press Club, in 2006, and attending to a speaker who stands outside the frame, to his left. Knowing this rather deflates the mystery of an expression that has suggested, to some, a visionary surveying the future. Obama listens, merely, with a grimly amused concentration that may be explained by the identity of the speaker, the conservative Senator Sam Brownback, of Kansas. Anyhow, with the A.P. seeking compensation for copyright infringement, the artist has sued for a judicial ruling of fair use. This audacious counterattack aside, the general issue is an old story of our litigious republic. Appropriative artists, including David Salle, Jeff Koons, and Richard Prince, have been sued at intervals since Campbell's soup went after Warhol, in 1962 (but then thought better of it).

As an art maven, I'm for granting artists blanket liberty to play with any existing image. I also realize that it is not going to happen, and I'm bored by the kerfuffle's rote recurrence, with its all but scripted lines for plaintiff and defendant alike. It is of a piece with Fairey's energetic but unoriginal enterprise involving a repertoire of well-worn provocations—imitations of Soviet agitprop on shopping bags designed for Saks, to cite one example. Warhol sublimely commodified images of Mao and the hammer and sickle four decades ago, in keeping with an ambition—to infuse subjects and tones of common culture with powers of high art—that has not grown old. Warhol's revelatory games with the cognitive dissonance between art and commerce have galvanized artists in every generation since. But you can stretch a frisson just so many times before it goes limp. Like the Japanese artist Takashi Murakami, who included a Louis Vuitton boutique in his Los Angeles retrospective, Fairey reverses a revolution achieved by Warhol, along with Roy Lichtenstein. He embraces a trend in what the critic Dave Hickey has called "pop masquerading as art, as opposed to art masquerading as pop."

The aesthetics of Fairey's Boston show are formulaic, but they exercise immediate power. He is a terrific designer. His screenprints on paper, canvas, plastic, and metal, from found photographs and illustrations—publicity portraits, vintage advertising and propaganda, historical icons (Patty Hearst with a machine gun), satirically altered cash and stock certificates—deploy a standard palette of acrid red, yellowish white, and black. (The red, white, and blue of "Hope" were an ad-hoc departure.) Often, the images are overlaid on printed or collaged grounds of wallpaper-like pattern or fragments of newspaper pages, which impart a palimpsestic texture and a flavor of antiquity. Fairey's stylistic borrowings from Russian Revolutionary, Soviet, and W.P.A. propaganda are often remarked upon, but borrowedness itself—studied anachronism—is his mode of seduction. His style's old-timey charm, however, is not inexhaustible. That leaves the inherent attraction of his subjects and of his selection of ready-made images to represent them. These include, besides mainstream heroes like Martin Luther King, Jr., and Muhammad Ali, Che, Fidel, Lenin, Stalin, Mao, Malcolm X, Angela Davis, generic freedom fighters, and "revolutionary women." Punks abound: Johnny Rotten and Sid Vicious, Debbie Harry, Iggy Pop. Let George W. Bush pictured as a vampire exemplify the calibre of Fairey's many satirical japes.

Fairey has said that the real message behind his work is "Question everything." I question the I.C.A. director Jill Medvedow's claim, in the show's catalogue, that Fairey pursues a "quest to challenge the status quo and disrupt our sense of complacency through his art." What isn't status quo about political rage? And have you met anyone not heavily medicated who strikes you as complacent lately? The retrospective is dated on arrival. Oddly, Fairey's splendid tour de force for Obama anticipated a new national mood, of serious-minded pragmatism, which makes ideological extremes seem sort of quaint. I found myself regarding the show as strangely wholesome, like a vaccine that defeats the virus it imitates. It's as if Fairey meant to ridicule rebellion. I'm not sure he knows what he meant, beyond wanting to get a rise out of people. But if he did know—that is, if he were a better artist—he probably could not have helped change the world with one magically ambiguous picture. ♦

NEWYORKER.COM

Peter Schjeldahl takes questions about art.

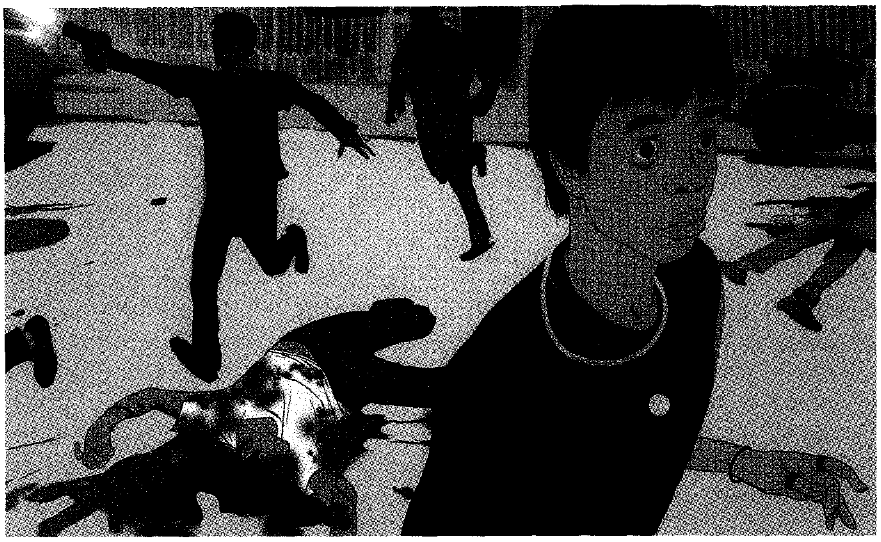
THE CURRENT CINEMA

GRITTY CITIES

"Gomorrah" and "Two Lovers."

BY ANTHONY LANE

The first thing you should know about "Gomorrah" is that no fewer than three members of its cast have been arrested on suspicion of illegal activities. There could be no more unimpeachable testament, surely, to the integrity of Matteo Garrone's film, which is about organized crime in Naples. Many of the actors were recruited from the area, presumably on the basis that they already knew the ropes, not to mention the Kalashnikovs.



Salvatore Abruzzese as a boy who gets caught up in the Neapolitan Mafia.

FRANK STOCKTON

You might say that the project smelled of trouble from the start. It began as a nonfiction book by the journalist Roberto Saviano, published in 2006, entitled "Gomorra"; one letter less gave more weight to the pun, yoking the Camorra, or Neapolitan Mafia, with a place of Biblical folly. The book, which opens with frozen Chinese corpses falling out of a shipping container on an Italian quayside—a small matter of human trafficking gone awry—was so detailed, and so incensed, in exposing the venalities of the Mob that Saviano now lives in hiding, under police protection. It was hard to picture his writhing tales of revenge being unpicked and sorted into cinematic sense, but somehow Garrone, working with a clan of screenwriters (including Saviano), has brought order to the sprawl. Even so, the result demands a patient viewing, and maybe more than one; only after a second dose did I get the measure of Garrone's mastery, and realize how far he has surpassed, not merely honored, the author's courageous toil.

There are five stories, layered and stuck together, raising the possibility that Garrone modelled the whole thing on a lasagna verde. We get them morsel by morsel, and the brisk dicing between them can catch the viewer unprepared. There is Totò (Salvatore Abruzzese), age thirteen, who spies a dropped gun in the street, returns it to local thugs, and, in reward, becomes a mini-mule in the drug trade. There is a pair of teen-agers, Marco (Marco Macor) and Ciro (Ciro Petrone), fools in love with a gangsterish ideal; "I'm No. 1! Tony Montana!" they cry, acting out their pantomime of "Scarface" in an empty tenement, where a sunken, unused bath echoes not just old Brian De Palma movies but much older tubs, in the *balneae* of Pompeii, across the bay. There is Don Ciro (Gianfelice Imparato), whose name hints at potency, but who is, in fact, a frightened hireling in a cheap blouson, distributing cash to those families who exist on the say-so of the Camorra. There is Franco (Toni Servillo), the most accomplished gentleman on view, and the one most at ease with evil; aided by a reluctant sidekick, Roberto (Carmine Paternoster), he arranges for the disposal of industrial waste. That sounds like a filmmaker's convenient symbol, but, if you live in certain parts of southern Italy, the poisoning of the land is right in front of your nose, and under your skin.

Last, and best, of the central figures is Pasquale, played by Salvatore Cantalupo. (Has any bunch of actors had better names?) Pasquale is a Thurberish drone, keeping his head down but unable to stop lifting up his eyes to resplendent things. He is a tailor, working his fingers off in the service of couture, or, rather, of its speedy, backroom simulacrum. In a bid to earn more, he accepts a secret offer to tutor Chinese immigrants in his delicate art, and what follows is a touching nocturnal farce. Bundled into the trunk of a car, he arrives not at some dripping sweatshop but at a spotless workplace, lined with eager apprentices who applaud his entrance as though he had come to conduct them: "They called me Maestro!" he whispers to his wife, creeping back at dawn. Moments like this achieve what so few American movies seem to be doing just now: they take on a big subject, unwieldy and unglamorous—in this case, the illegal economies that thrive under globalization, and on which we unwittingly feed—and dig out from it a cluster of private dramas that are highly specific (some Italian audiences required subtitles for "Gomorrah," so parochial is the Neapolitan dialect), and yet which could, you feel, find an answering gleam almost anywhere on the planet. Toward the close, at a truck stop, Pasquale glances at a TV and sees a clip of a radiant Scarlett Johansson parading at a movie première, wearing a dress that he himself ran up at cut price, or perhaps its costlier identical twin; the expression on the tailor's face is, you might say, his

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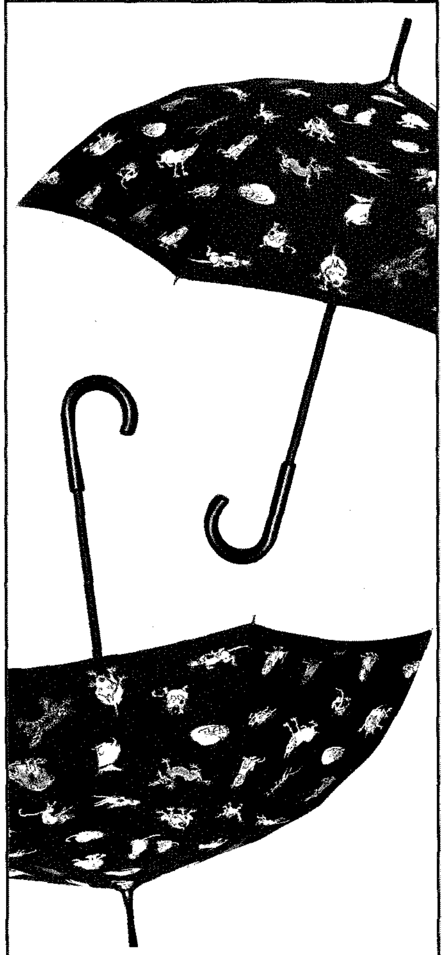

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But then "Gomorrah" is a beautiful movie. That may sound perverse, given its welter of drive-by shootings and toxic dumps, but what is most impressive about Garrone is his refusal to let his style be bulldozed by the runaway violence of his subject. This is *organized* crime. Not for him the panicky, catch-me-if-you-can approach of a film like "City of God"—or, indeed, like "Slumdog Millionaire," which next to "Gomorrah" seems like an adventure vacation. The mobsters may be trigger-frenzied, but the movie takes constant care, with a kind of appalled wonder, to survey the arenas of their mayhem. Don Ciro does the rounds of Scampia, a northern suburb of Naples, where people live and die in tower blocks that look like ruined ziggurats. Most of the camerawork is handheld, but now and then we pull back for a lofted view: a panorama as unruffled as an Andreas Gursky photograph. Meanwhile, Totò and other kids, in some murky shell of a building, take turns to strap on a makeshift bulletproof vest, get shot in the chest, struggle to their feet, and thereby prove themselves as men-in-waiting; as each vanishes into the gloom to receive his blow, we could be watching a parable of the ancient underworld. Few recent films have been as timely as "Gomorrah," yet time itself seems to melt around the action; when an ambushed car crashes into an array of mock-classical statuary, you think, Is that the fate of the Roman past? To be cracked into plaster dust by the antics of modern hoodlums?

Garrone's film is less furious than Saviano's book, which has the tang of personal nausea, and for that reason, I suspect, it will prove more enduring. (It failed to make the nominations for Best Foreign Film at the Academy Awards: the usual travesty.) As I watched various Scampians being slain or spared on a whim, I felt borne along not so much by reportage, however well dramatized, as by a fierce meditation on the vagaries of fate—and thus, oddly enough, by the pull of comedy. When Franco, in a cathedral-size quarry, needs a new set of truck drivers to shift his drums of corrosive chemicals, whom does he call? Local children, who perch on cushions to see through the windshield; in a way, they make better mafiosi than the adults, yielding with less caution and complaint to their instinctual urges. There is a terrible numbness to the grownups, spun in the endless cycle of revenge; "We don't know anything" is the conclusion of one group, which agrees to press ahead with murder, for want of another plan. I'm not sure that, after this movie, I will be able to take quite such unquestioning pleasure in the suave, all-knowing dons of the "Godfather" trilogy, let alone the stylized brutality of "Scarface"; the spoiled earth of "Gomorrah" is the ground zero of Mob cinema, burning away the sleekness and self-congratulation of the genre. The movie ends on a beach, every bit as haunting as those deserted strands unveiled by Antonioni in "The Girlfriends" and "Beyond the Clouds." We could, in short, be watching the loveliest of art-house films, were it not for the dead bodies being scooped off the sand by a digger. When human beings become flotsam, all that art can do is stand and look.

After the terrors of "Gomorrah," the moral landscape of "Two Lovers," the new James Gray film, seems altogether smaller and quieter, though scarred by desolations of its own. There are misdemeanors here, but no major crimes—not unless you count the mortal sin committed in the opening scene, which finds a man named Leonard (Joaquin Phoenix) jumping off a low bridge into a river. As suicide attempts go, it barely makes a splash; passersby haul him out, and, without pausing to thank them, he damply sets off home. What hooks you, amid the strange dismay, is the humdrum: the dry cleaning that Leonard was carrying before his leap. Somehow the clothes, in their protective bag, seem more likely to survive the film than he does.

Leonard, who suffers from a bipolar condition, lives with his parents in Brighton Beach. In an effort to draw him out, they introduce him to Sandra (Vinessa Shaw), the daughter of friends, who is both so luscious and so balanced—who lights such a possible path back to contentment—that you just know he will veer off into the dark. The veering starts when he meets Michelle (Gwyneth Paltrow), who lives in his apartment building, and into whose window he can peer with held breath. Their acquaintance ripens across the courtyard, and "Two Lovers" takes its humble place in a line of movies, headed by "Rear Window" and "In a Lonely Place," which bloom in awkward spaces and tight corners. This may be domestic romance, yet there are scenes in which the Gray who made "The Yards" and "We Own the Night" starts to needle the action with pinpricks of the old suspense, as when Leonard skulks behind a bedroom door, or when he waits, and waits, for Michelle to glimmer out of the shadows of the courtyard and join him in fleeing the city. For a few seconds, he could be in a jailbreak movie, trapped within high walls.

"Two Lovers" is not a happy film. Nor would you expect it to be, given that it springs in part from a Dostoyevsky story called "White Nights." Leonard and Michelle, in particular, are lumbered with so much baggage that they seem more like pack animals than like functioning citizens. "I think he tried again," Leonard's mother says, as he returns dripping from the river; "I think she might be using again," Ronald (Elias Koteas) says of Michelle, who feels the lure of drugs. Ronald is what used to be called a sugar daddy; he pays for her apartment, and for services rendered, thereby insuring that she loathes herself for being unable to kick the sugar. No loyalty goes undivided here. Leonard has a heart to match his mind, split between two women (although you sometimes want to ask what they see in him, and why some guys get all the luck); Michelle calls him "my new best friend," but can't picture him as anything more serious, preferring the oily Ronald; even Leonard's mother sees that what is right for her son can tug and tear at what is good for him. She is played by Isabella Rossellini, no less, and, toward the end, there are a couple of expressions in that captivating gaze of hers which are so brimful of love, understanding, and pity that you hardly know where to turn. On paper, I imagine, Gray's final scene would read like a peaceful solution, but his camera is wiser, scanning the apartment and catching a character's eye, and were the director to return to the fray in five years' time I doubt whether the update would be one of bliss. However moody, though, "Two Lovers" didn't strike me as a downer, for the simple reason that it wells with sights and sounds that are guaranteed to lift, not sink, the spirits—two drifting souls embracing on a rooftop, in a scatter of snow, or Leonard, basically a boy from the sticks, visiting midtown Manhattan to the strains of Henry Mancini. I don't *think* that bit was in Dostoyevsky, but I could be wrong. ♦

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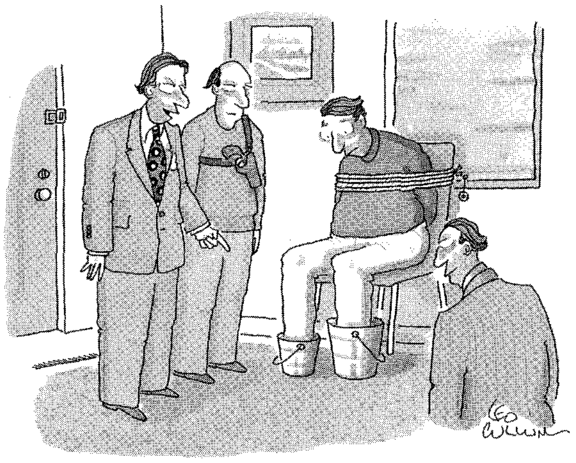
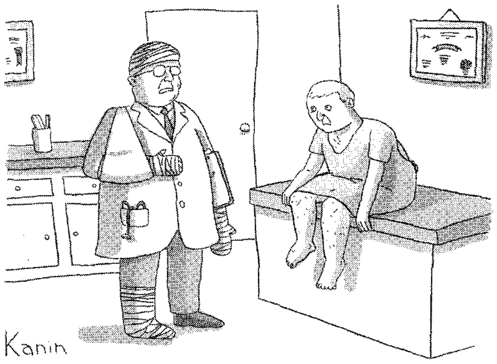
CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Sidney Harris, must be received by Sunday, February 22nd. Finalists in the February 2nd contest appear below; go online to vote. We will announce the winner, along with the finalists in this week's contest, in the March 9th issue. The winner will be given a signed print of the cartoon. Any U.S. resident age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit www.newyorker.com/captioncontest.

THE WINNING CAPTION



"It's sloppy work like that that gives the mob a bad name."
Gordon Baumbacher, Kentfield, Calif.



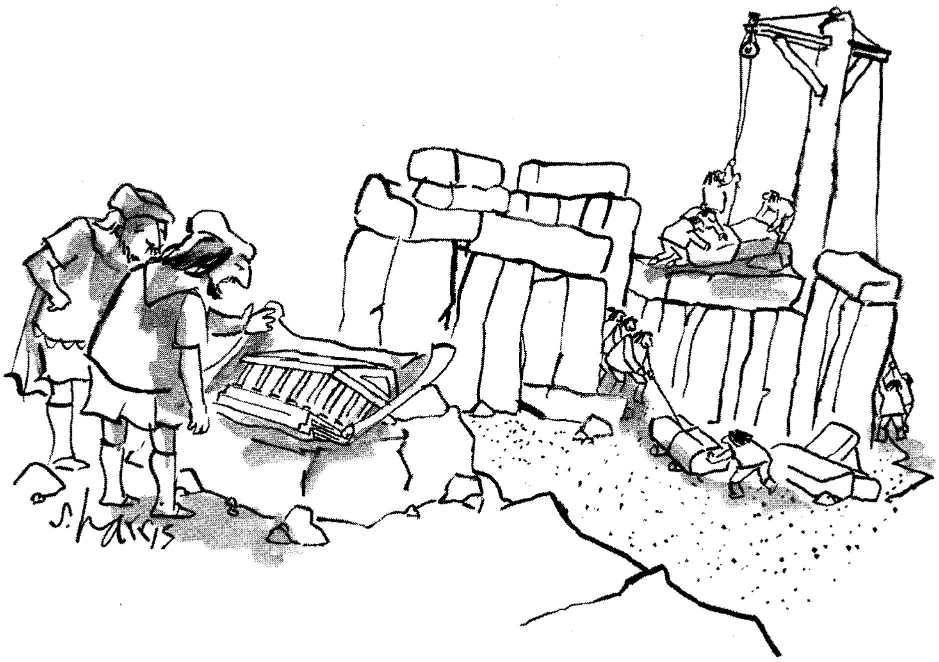
THE FINALISTS

"So a doctor walks into a bar—this is not a joke, by the way."
James Allen, Lambertville, N.J.

"Until I recover, let's just assume your prostate is fine."
Jeff Goodman, Burnsville, N.C.

"Sorry, we're out of medical supplies."
Christina Rodriguez, San Diego, Calif.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



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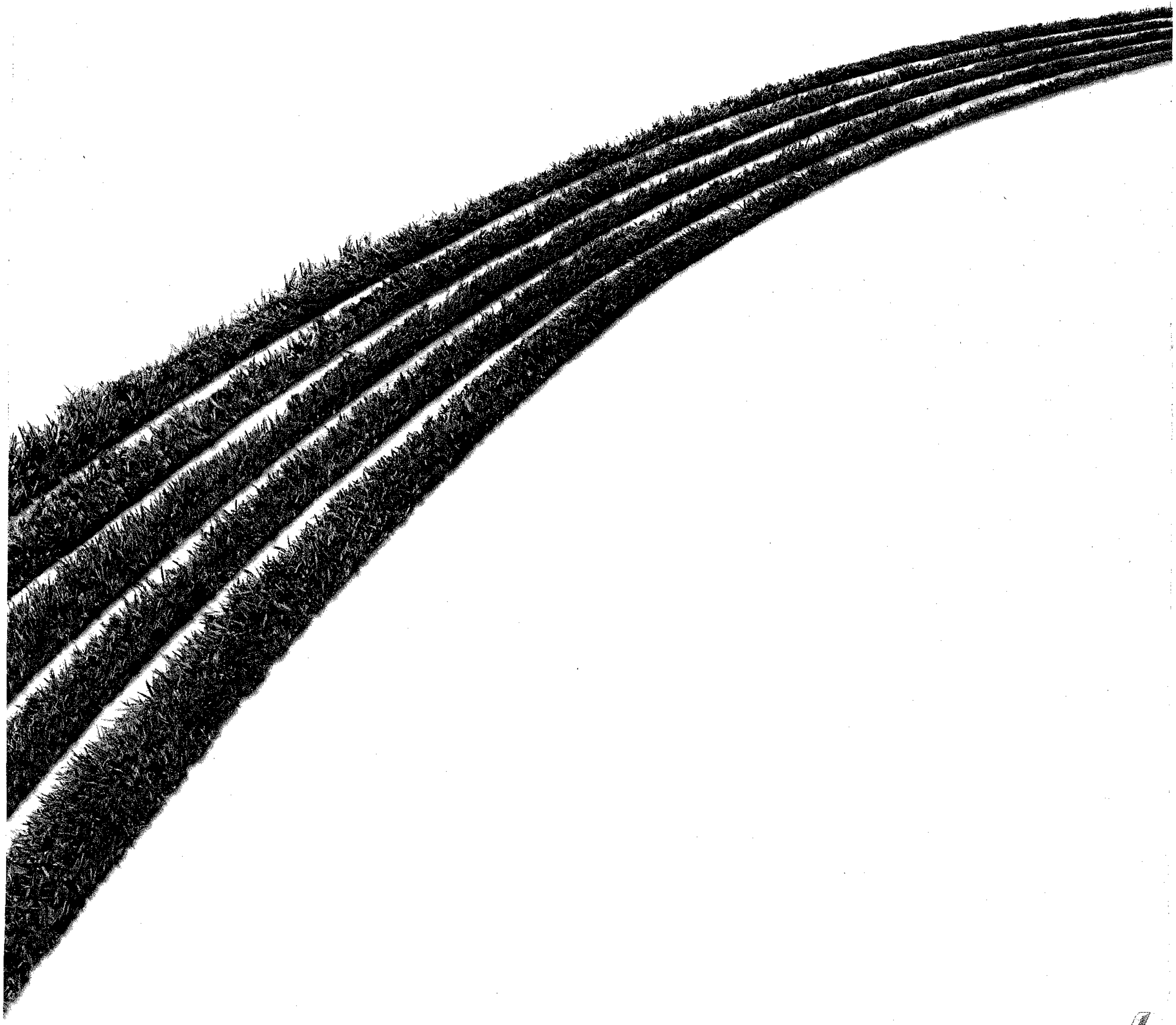

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